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CERTIFICATION OF FINANCIAL AID ADMINISTRATORS

by

Stacey A. Peterson
BS May 1987, Old Dominion University
M.Ed. August 1998, Western Washington University

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of
Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirement for the Degree of


DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Approved by:

Dana Burnett (Director)

 Joseph Devitis (Member)

A. Dallas Martin (Member) 

 Jack Robinson (Member)

ABSTRACT

CERTIFICATION OF FINANCIAL AID ADMINISTRATORS

Stacey A. Peterson
Old Dominion University, 2011
Director: Dr. Dana D. Burnett

The certification of financial aid administrators has been debated for over 37 years. A job satisfaction survey conducted by the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA, 2008a) revealed that college and university administrators' perceptions of the efficiency, effectiveness, and quality of the services provided by the financial aid office have a direct effect on the job satisfaction of financial aid practitioners. The study also hinted at a possible link between these perceptions and the resources allocated to the financial aid office. Open-ended comments collected as a part of the survey suggested that while members of the financial aid community view themselves as a profession, those external to the industry might not share the same perception. A certification process for financial aid administrators was suggested as a solution. As such, this non-experimental descriptive exploratory analysis of existing data examined the need, benefits, and level of support for a voluntary certification process within the new theoretical framework of professionalization developed for this study. The findings refute decades of anecdotal evidence indicating the majority of financial aid administrators do not see a need for or support a certification process, fills a void in the literature, and provides recommendations for future research.

This dissertation is dedicated in loving memory of my son:

Lance Lamar Norfleet

March 20, 1991 – May 3, 1994

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ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

This dissertation contains five chapters. *Chapter I*, the introduction, provides information related to professionalization of financial aid administrators and proposes a new theoretical framework for professionalization. It also contains: (a) a statement of the problem, (b) the purpose of the study, (c) the research questions, (d) the significance of the study, (e) the relationship of the study to higher education leadership, (f) an overview of the methodology, (g) the limitations of this study, and (h) the definitions of select terms as used within the context of this study. *Chapter II* is a chronological review of the literature. It provides: (a) a brief overview of the history of credentialing for financial aid administrators including the pros and cons of certification; (b) an overview of the evolution of credentialing in the closely related fields of accounting, evaluation, and grant writing, including suggested prerequisites for a credentialing process; and (c) an explanation of the significance of the body of research reviewed to this study. *Chapter III* describes the methodology. It describes the knowledge or lens through which the researcher examined the research problem. It includes the research design and explains the relationship of the research questions to the research design within the context of this study. It also describes the data sources; explains the validity and justification of the research design; and describes the data analysis procedures. *Chapter IV* is the discussion of the analysis of the results. It contains information about the survey population and survey respondents. It includes information on the demographic characteristics of the respondents, response frequencies, and response rates. It also includes information on the: (a) perceived need and benefits of certification; (b) level of support for certification; (c) suggested components of a certification process; (d) percentage of the survey

respondents who would seek certification if it were offered; and (e) compiled open-ended responses. The final chapter, *Chapter V*, contains the summary, conclusions, potential implications of this study, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Certification of Financial Aid Administrators – Is It Time to Move Forward?

There are many diverse opinions within the financial aid community regarding certification of financial aid administrators. It is an idea that has come and gone over the past three decades. Previous attempts to implement certification at the state and regional levels were discontinued not because the idea lacked merit, but because of potential liability issues, the lack of support from the financial aid community as a whole, and the 1978 decision of the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) not to take a formal position on the matter (National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators [NASFAA], 1988).

Professional certification re-emerged as an interest of the 2009-10 national chair of NASFAA. He charged the 2009-10 Institutional Program Management Committee with the task of exploring certification of financial aid practitioners and making a recommendation to the NASFAA Board of Directors. The end result was an unpublished issue paper compiled by the committee in which they suggested the purpose of certification would be to: (a) ensure accountability of financial aid practitioners as fiduciaries; (b) increase the respect and status of the profession; (c) ensure that financial aid practitioners have a certain skill set and certain level of expertise; and (d) provide a mechanism to ensure financial aid practitioners pledge to uphold the NASFAA statement of professional ethics (NASFAA, 2009). According to the committee, certification would serve as the mechanism to ensure practicing financial aid administrators meet a common set of core standard.

Professionalization Versus Certification

In the broadest sense, professionalization is defined as the development of a common concern, standardized practices, and a code of ethical behavior among members of an occupation (Sanderson, 1971). Caplow (1954) describes professionalization as a predictable sequenced process by which an occupation evolves into a profession. It is a continuum between two extremes – the occupation and the profession – with quantifiable measures. The measures are: (a) the degree of personal involvement; (b) a wide knowledge of a specialized technique; (c) a sense of obligation and group identity; (d) the perception of significance of the occupational service to society; (e) the capability of the group to establish a body of knowledge organized around abstract principles that are applicable to concrete human conditions; and (f) the ability and willingness of the group to bear responsibility for creating and validating the body of knowledge (Vollmer & Mills, 1966).

Caplow's (1954) theory consists of a predictable sequence of steps. It begins with the establishment of a professional association. This is followed by the establishment of a new name or a change in the existing name of the occupation. The next step is the development and implementation of a code of ethics. The final step in Caplow's theory is a period of prolonged political agitation during which formal training programs are developed and professional standards are adopted.

Harold Wilensky (1964) also describes professionalism as a sequence of steps. The steps in Wilensky's theory are: (a) the formation of a full-time occupation, (b) the formation of a professional association, (c) job stratification, (d) the establishment of a formal training school, and (e) the formation of a code of ethics. The steps in Wilensky's

theory do not occur in any particular order. In fact, Wilensky (1964) argues that they may occur simultaneously; however, each step must be completed to some degree for an occupation to evolve into a profession. Both theories are listed in Appendix A.

The theoretical framework adapted for this study is a hybrid of Theodore Caplow's (1954) and Harold Wilensky's (1964) concepts of professionalization. While there are a few similarities between the two theories, there are several differences. However, the foundation of both theories is that occupations go through a sequence of stages on their way to becoming professions.

As it has evolved, the financial aid profession completed all steps in Wilensky's (1964) theory. Like Wilensky's theory, the steps of the hybrid theory adopted for this study do not have to be completed in any particular order, but an occupation must engage in each phase and establish a common set of core standards that must be met by all practitioners in order for it to evolve into a profession. The financial aid occupation has completed the majority of the steps outlined in the hybrid theory described in Appendix A. Each step as it relates to Caplow's (1954) and Wilensky's (1964) theories is explained in chronological order based on the year in which the profession began to engage in each phase in *Chapter II* in the *Evolution of the Financial Aid Profession* section.

The occupation also completed two additional steps that may be unique to higher education associations. It established a mechanism for advocacy on behalf of its members and the families they serve, and it implemented a review process to evaluate financial aid office operations. These additional steps are also discussed in *Chapter 2* and listed in Appendix A. For the purpose of this study, we will call the hybrid theory the *Higher Education Theory of Professionalization*.

Credentialing has increased exponentially over the past three decades (Knapp & Knapp, 2002). Some examples of the types of credentialing offered include, but are not limited to, certification, accreditation, and licensing. Certification is the concept explored in this study. According to Knapp & Knapp (2002), certification is a voluntary process used by an organization to attest that an individual satisfies certain qualifications and/or meets a predetermined standard. Similarly, accreditation is a process used by an entity to grant public recognition to an organization that has met certain predetermined standards. Whereas licensing is a mandatory process used by government agencies to grant permission to individuals and entities to participate in certain occupational or professional activities by attesting that they have attained the minimum level of knowledge and skills necessary to ensure the safety, health, and welfare of the public. For the purpose of this study, credentialing is defined as a voluntary process used to grant credentials to individuals and/or organizations that meet certain pre-determined qualifications and standards. It encompasses certification, accreditation, and licensing.

Background

Certification of financial aid administrators is a topic that has been debated on and off over the past 37 years. A financial aid job satisfaction survey (NASFAA, 2008a) revealed approximately 77% of financial aid practitioners indicated they are valued by their supervisors, and 60% of the respondents indicated the financial aid office is respected and valued by other offices on campus. However, over half of the respondents indicated that campus senior administrators do not understand or appreciate the complexity of financial aid administration; approximately 60% said their offices are not

adequately staffed; and about 63% indicated their budgets were not adequate to provide needed services to their students.

These findings are consistent with the findings of an earlier study of Illinois financial aid administrators conducted by Clement & White (1983), and raise questions about how college and university administrators' perceptions of financial aid administration affect the resources allocated to the financial aid office. Peterson (2008a) identified nine factors that influence college and university administrators' perceptions of financial aid administrators as part of a pilot study conducted to identify the implications of these factors for the allocation of resources to the financial aid office. However, at the time this study was conducted there is no research data to support anecdotal evidence related to the opinions and concerns of financial aid administrators; how they perceive themselves as a profession; and whether certification is desired or needed (Brooks, 1986; NASFAA, 1988, 2009).

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to provide an analysis of the archival data collected from the NASFAA membership (NASFAA, 2010) to advance the conversation on certification, and provide stakeholders with literature and research data that may be used to determine if it is time to set core standards that all financial aid practitioners must meet. The social constructivism paradigm (Creswell, 2003) will be used to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the perceived benefits of certification among NASFAA members, including differences and similarities between various demographic groups?

2. What are the perceived detriments of certification among NASFAA members, including differences and similarities between various demographic groups?
3. What type of certification process is most desirable to NASFAA members, including differences and similarities in components identified by various demographic groups?
4. What percentage of the NASFAA membership would pursue certification if it were an option?
5. What additional information is needed to inform policy decisions in this area?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is to advance the conversation on certification of financial aid administrators based on relevant literature and research data. A debate about this topic has been occurring within the financial aid community for over three decades (NASFAA, 1974, 1988, 2009). The results of this study will provide data to supplement existing anecdotal evidence that has been the foundation of the prolonged political agitation regarding certification for financial aid practitioners, and will assist the financial aid community in determining if it should move forward with certification (Fertig, 2009; NASFAA, 1988, 2009). It will help determine if financial aid administrators think there are any benefits and/or detriments to certification or some other means of setting a core set of standards, and will assess the willingness of members of the financial aid community to support such an effort. Another reason this study is significant is it will help establish and explain the parameters for defining a core set of standards for financial aid administrators, and identify additional information needed to inform future policy decisions on this topic. This study will also fill a void in the

literature and serve as a catalyst for future research.

Relationship to Higher Education Leadership

Peterson (2008a) found that the two primary factors that influence college and university administrators' allocation of resources to the financial aid office are knowledge and understanding of the administration of Title IV programs. For the purpose of the study, knowledge was the extent to which college and university administrators are cognizant of all aspects of the administration of Title IV programs, and understanding was the extent to which they comprehend or have a mental grasp on all aspects of the administration of these programs (Peterson, 2008a). Once the parameters for certification are identified and explained in the context of the research literature, the common set of core standards that all financial aid practitioners must meet will be more apparent to college and university administrators, and perhaps have a positive effect on their perceptions of financial aid administrators.

Overview of Methodology

Design, Data Collection Methods, and Sampling Procedures

This was a non-experimental descriptive exploratory study, using archival data, conducted from a social constructivism paradigm (Creswell, 2003). The population surveyed was the NASFAA membership. The data collection was a descriptive analysis of data collected by an electronic survey of the NASFAA membership related to the benefits and level of support for professional recognition; the desired components of a professional recognition process for financial aid practitioners; and the percentage of the NASFAA membership that would participate in a professional recognition process, if it were an option. The data collected was maintained on a NASFAA server that was

backed-up nightly and periodically burned to a compact disk, and a computer hard drive at a separate location that was be backed-up frequently onto a jump drive and stored in a secured separate location.

Permission was obtained from NASFAA to obtain and use the data from the electronically administered survey of the NASFAA membership using the survey instrument in Appendix D. The data was analyzed using a combination of the Vovici software used to administer the survey and SPSS. The structured, open-ended responses were reviewed and coded. A codebook was created to perform a content analysis and identify emerging themes.

Instrument Development

The design of the survey instrument used to collect the archival data was the result of a rigorous process employed by the stakeholders represented by the NASFAA Institutional Program Management Committee (IPMC). The researcher served as the NASFAA staff liaison to the committee. Questions suggested by the researcher served as the first draft of the survey instrument. The draft survey instrument was reviewed by the IPMC and comments were sent via email to the researcher. Changes to the structure and order of the survey questions to which there was consensus were made and a second draft was distributed to the committee. A notable change is the committee's decision to replace the term certification with the term professional recognition process, and define professional recognition as the process of establishing a common set of core standards, or levels of standards that all financial aid administrators must meet which may include voluntary credentialing; degree programs; mandatory training and/or professional development activities; and/or internships.

During a series of seven conference calls over a four-month period, the committee reviewed each question. All committee members, except the researcher who was tasked with revising the survey instrument, were given the opportunity to provide feedback on each question. Revised questions were read aloud and each committee member was again asked to provide feedback on the question. The researcher served as a resource person to provide answers to questions about research design and methodology. This process continued until consensus was reached on all survey questions and a final survey was approved by all committee members.

Next, the survey instrument was entered into the Vovici software and pilot tested by committee members. After a few additional minor revisions based on feedback received from the committee, the survey instrument was submitted to the NASFAA Research Committee for review and testing. Additional revisions were made based on feedback received from the Research Committee. The final survey instrument was approved by both the Institutional Program Management Committee and the Research Committees.

Data Analysis

The first step in the data analysis process was to proofread the data in the Vovici software to identify and target data items that were missing or needed further attention. Next, both the Vovici software and SPSS was used to validate the data and conduct data screening to identify and target variables that needed to be deleted, transformed, recoded, and/or recomputed. Some respondents provided demographic data only (452) and few respondents (10) provided invalid responses. As a result, 462 cases were excluded from the data analysis.

Next, descriptive statistics were calculated on the survey responses, including the percentage of the membership responding to the survey. Mean comparisons were calculated by category. Comparisons were done to see if there were differences in the perceived benefits, perceived detriments, and level of support for setting a core set of standards across institution type, level of education, functional role, occupational title, and years of experience. In addition, crosstabs were calculated to determine if there was a relationship between categorical variables.

Limitations of the Study

There are some limitations inherent in this study. There is a void in the research literature on both the perceived benefits and level of support for the certification of financial aid administrators in general. In addition, the findings, especially the open-ended responses to the survey, may be subject to other interpretations. Another limitation is the themes or other considerations that emerged from the research data could not be followed-up on during this study; however, they may provide direction for future research.

NASFAA has individual, organizational, and institutional based memberships. Organizational and institutional based members may list multiple contacts. A unique survey link was generated and sent to each individual listed in the NASFAA membership database with instructions to forward the link to other stakeholders at the member organization or institution. As such, there is a possibility that nonmembers responded to the survey. However, according to Dr. A. Dallas Martin (personal communication, September 27, 2011), it is very unlikely that a non-financial aid practitioner completed the survey. Despite these limitations, this study will contribute to the literature on the

perceived benefits, detriments, level of support, and desired components of a certification process for financial aid practitioners, and inform future policy decisions on this topic.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

advocacy: The encouragement or promotion of a cause on behalf of an individual or group.

certification: A voluntary process used by an organization to attest that an individual satisfies certain qualifications and/or meets a pre-determined standard.

code of ethics: Standards of conduct that should be followed by financial aid practitioners in the day-to-day administration of Title IV programs across institutions.

constructivism: a knowledge claim that focuses on theory generation based on formulating an understanding of certain objects, things, and occurrences based on experiences; and the social, political, and historical context in which they occur.

credentialing: A process used to grant credentials to individuals and/or organizations that meet certain pre-determined qualifications and standards (i.e. certification, accreditation, licensing, etc.).

empirical research: Research conducted to answer a question or test a hypothesis based on observation or evidence.

financial aid administrator: An individual who is responsible for one or more aspects of the administration of financial aid programs at a postsecondary institution.

institutional program management committee (IPMC): The National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators' committee responsible for examining relevant issues that impact the administration of Title IV financial aid and developing products to facilitate effective, efficient, and compliant management of financial aid programs, operations, and services.

national association of student financial aid administrators (NASFAA): A nonprofit association that advocates on the behalf of postsecondary schools, students and parents for maximum funding and effective delivery of financial assistance programs to remove barriers to postsecondary education for needy students who want to pursue educational goals beyond high school.

professional association: A nonprofit organization of individuals dedicated to promoting a common interest.

profession: A trade or occupation requiring specialized knowledge, skills, and/or special academic training.

professional recognition process: the establishment of a common set of core standards, or levels of standards that all financial aid administrators must meet, which may include voluntary credentialing; degree programs; mandatory training and/or professional development activities; and/or internships.

professionalization: The process of transforming an occupation into a profession that requires individuals to meet a common set of core standards to practice a designated line of work.

research committee: The NASFAA committee with the primary responsibility for promoting and facilitating student aid research.

sanctioning: The ratification or confirmation that an institution's financial aid operations meet a certain standard.

Title IV programs: Federal student financial assistance programs consisting of grants, work study, and loans created under the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Criteria for Inclusion and Exclusion of Literature

There was a significant amount of literature on certification. While the NASFAA Annotated Bibliography of Student Financial Aid database contained 1,865 documents, there was no literature found on certification of financial aid administrators. The Old Dominion University Education Dissertations and Theses Full Text database contained 5,023 documents on certification, 54 of which focused on certification for higher education associations. The Old Dominion University Education Full Text database contained 33 documents that focused on certification by higher education professional associations, some of which were duplicates of documents identified in the Old Dominion University Education Dissertations and Theses Full Text Database. Other sources of relevant literature included the NASFAA Newsletter, the NASFAA Journal of Student Financial Aid, and the NASFAA Transcript Magazine.

The literature initially selected for review was limited to peer-reviewed articles and studies about U.S. professional organizations or associations in higher education, or a closely related field that focused on exploring, creating, and/or revamping the credentialing process. The pool was subsequently reduced to 30 documents related to the theory of professionalism; and professional organizations or associations in financial aid administration, or a closely related field, that focused on exploring, creating, and revamping the credentialing process. Among the studies selected, eleven focused on certification in the fields of accounting, evaluation, and other related professions. A book on implementing certification for higher education associations was also included.

Certification of Financial Aid Administrators and Other Related Professions

The increase in public demand for accountability combined with emergent innovative technologies are two factors that have fueled the growth in the number of organizations offering certification over the past thirty years (Knapp & Knapp, 2002). The need for a certification process for financial aid practitioners has been debated equally as long (NASFAA, 2009).

According to members of the NASFAA 2009-10 Institutional Program Management Committee (IPMC), certification of the financial aid practitioners would ensure accountability of financial aid administrators as fiduciaries (NASFAA, 2009), and help increase the respect and status of the profession. In addition, it would be a means of ensuring that financial aid practitioners have a certain skill set and a certain level of expertise, as well as provide a mechanism to ensure financial aid practitioners pledge to uphold the NASFAA statement of professional ethics.

History of Certification of Financial Aid Administrators

Understanding the history of the debate on certification of financial aid practitioners was important because it provided the information needed to understand the progress that the industry has made towards adopting a certification process. The financial aid specific literature on certification was limited to anecdotal journal articles and committee reports. From the onset of the profession, financial aid administrators have been confused with clerical staff by higher education stakeholders (NASFAA, 1988). The national association was created to change this perception (NASFAA, 1988) and to help organize and coordinate the efforts of regional associations (Brooks, 1986).

Brooks (1986) provided a brief description of the first decade of NASFAA's efforts to develop a certification process for financial aid practitioners. He noted that although the association's goals called for expansion of this effort, obtaining agreement among financial aid practitioners on this issue proved insurmountable.

The very first formal steps toward certification began as early as 1974 with the formation of the NASFAA Committee on Certification. The committee issued a report (NASFAA, 1974) establishing criteria for a formal certification process based on its assessment of the need for a national standard for certification of financial aid practitioners. The following year Moore (1975) challenged the academic route and the four essential criteria for certification proposed by the committee. He questioned the soundness of a competency-based model in the absence of research to validate its success. He suggested an alternative model under which some criteria such as the courses taken to earn the required degree were less stringent, and the competencies needed to perform certain functions successfully were more definitive.

More than a decade later, the 1987-88 NASFAA Institutional Management Committee (1988), identified the advantages, disadvantages, and problems of credentialing financial aid practitioners. The committee solicited feedback from other associations that had explored and/or implemented a certification process. Responses were received from 15 professional organizations; however, there is no record of data analysis, conclusions, or recommendations resulting from the survey. A decade later, a pilot study identified professionalism as one of the nine factors that influence college and university administrators' perceptions of the financial aid office (Peterson, 2008a). The following year, the 2008-09 NASFAA Institutional Program Management Committee

revisited the issues identified by the 1987-88 committee (NASFAA, 2009). This group proposed that certification would ensure accountability of financial aid administrators, increase the respect and status of the profession, and ensure that financial aid practitioners have a certain skill set as well as a certain level of expertise. The committee recommended NASFAA conduct a survey of the membership to identify the need and level of support for a certification process. The survey was conducted in March 2008. The archival data compiled was analyzed and the findings are discussed in the results section of this study.

Studies specifically relevant to the certification of financial aid practitioners were limited to peer-reviewed literature. The literature contained two studies and two journal articles related to the education, training, and experience of financial aid administrators that have implications for certification in the field. Four studies related to education, training, and experience (Allen, 1998; Gray, 1983; Karbens, 1983; & McFall, 1999) and two pertinent to the certification process (Mauldin, 1997; Miranti, 1985) came from the accounting field. There is a study on grandfathering (exempting existing practitioners from some or all of the certification process) from the home economics field (Grogan, 1990), a study on the certification process from the evaluation field (Jones, 2001), and a study that explores post-certification from the grant profession field (Renninger, 2007). The remaining study (Gilley, 1985) and the book published by Lenora & Joan Knapp (2002) examined the certification process for higher education associations in general.

The relevance of each of these pieces of literature to this study is discussed in *The Certification Process* section of this literature review.

Education, Training, and Experience

Schiesz (1974) surveyed 128 Illinois student financial aid directors and used frequency analysis to examine and describe career patterns; the amount and type of training; methods used to ensure professional competence; professional activities; and ideas on how to achieve professional status. Respondents identified on-the-job training as the primary method used to train neophyte financial aid administrators; however, internships were identified as the most desirable method of obtaining practical experience. At about the same time, a Boston College study group recognized the void in formal degree and training programs for financial aid administrators (Delaney, Jr., Hylander, Karp, & Lange, 1974) and the need for universities, education leaders, and professional associations at the local and national levels to address the problem. The group developed the curriculum model for a Master's degree in financial aid administration in Appendix B; however, the curriculum was never adopted or implemented by the higher education community.

In 1981, Fenske & Bowman conducted a study to assess the current and future training needs of financial aid practitioners in the state of Arizona by conducting a survey on past and present training programs. This information was then used to develop a model for financial aid training activities in the state. Over 50% of the respondents identified informal apprenticeships as the most helpful way of acquiring knowledge and practical experience about financial aid. Twenty-five years later, a NASFAA task force endorsed the standards published by the Council for Advancement of Standards in Higher

Education (CAS) recommending that professional financial aid staff hold an earned graduate degree in a field relevant to the position they hold, or possess an appropriate combination of education credentials and related work experience (Crissman & Martin, 2006).

Literature related to the education, training, and experience criteria for certification adopted by other related fields is important to this study because the financial aid community can learn from the mistakes and benefit from the successes of other professions. The criteria established by other professions can be used to help establish benchmarks for education, training, and experience requirements if a professional recognition process is adopted.

In 1983, Gray conducted a survey of 1400 members of the New York Society of Certified Public Accountants (CPAs) to identify factors that encourage continued professional education (CPE) and found reinforcement in the workplace was a major factor. During the same year, Karbens (1983) applied public policy analysis concepts to a random sample of 589 Hawaiian CPAs, members of the Hawaiian chapter of National Accounting Association, and University of Hawaii accounting major graduates to study changes needed in the law related to CPA licensing requirements. Karbens identified differences in opinions among these three groups related to the education and experience requirements needed to obtain a CPA license. All participants supported a two-year experience requirement, but did not support post-baccalaureate education requirements.

More than a decade later, Allen (1998) conducted a study to explore the relationship between the 150 credit-hour criterion that candidates must meet to become Certified Public Accountants, and students' perception of an accounting education and a

career in accounting. The results of the study were consistent with the hypothesis that there is a positive relationship between students' perceptions of the 150 credit-hour requirement, choice of academic program, and career choice. McFall (1999) validated Allen's 1998 findings in his study where he found that there are several avenues to reach the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) position. McFall's review of the professional histories of the survey participants revealed the prevalence of undergraduate degrees in accounting and masters in business administration (MBAs). The norm was to have a graduate degree, but not a doctoral degree.

The findings of the studies on education, training, and experience for accounting professionals (Allen, 1998; Gray, 1983; Karbens, 1983; & McFall, 1999) were consistent with the CAS standards endorsed by NASFAA for financial aid practitioners. That is, ideally financial aid staff should hold a graduate degree in a field relevant to the position they hold, or possess an appropriate combination of education credentials and related work experience (Crissman & Martin, 2006).

The Certification Process

At the time this study was conducted, there was no formal research on certification of financial aid administrators; as such, this section focuses on studies in related fields. The American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) is a professional organization that represents autonomy, power, status, and prestige – it is the epitome of professionalism. *From Conflict to Consensus: The American Institute of Accountants and the Professionalization of Public Accountancy, 1886-1940* (Miranti, 1986) was a relevant study that provided a historical chronology from the 1880's to the 1940's of what is today known as the AICPA. It followed the different and sometimes

conflicting explanations of the significance of the activities that led to the development of the organizational structure of the accounting profession including the division between national and state associations over governance of the profession. This division only served to confuse the public (Miranti, 1986).

According to Miranti (1985), the accounting profession was most venerable during the great depression when the federal government began to infringe on its autonomy. This infringement along with fear of the newly formed Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) provided the impetus for the merger of the American Institute of Accountants (AIA) with the American Society of Certified Public Accountants (ASCPA) in 1936 to form the AICPA. The newly formed institute agreed to restrict future members to CPAs (American Institute of Certified Public Accountants [AICPA], 2010).

Over a decade later, the profession began to explore the controversial topic of credentialing in accounting specializations (Mauldin, 1997). In his study, Mauldin examined the public and regulatory perspectives of this heavily debated topic in order to gain insight into whether the AICPA should assume this task. The result of the study supported credentialing of CPAs in specific areas of accounting that have unregulated designations.

Grogan (1990) conducted a study to examine the perspectives of members of the American Home Economics Association about the association's certification grandfathering clause and to determine if there were any differences in perspectives between certified and non-certified members. The grandfathering clause exempted existing members from the certification requirements. Participants in the study were

surveyed prior to the announcement of the certification program and again after the program were introduced. The results revealed that the level of satisfaction from being a home economist, job status, and self-esteem as a professional prior to the announcement were high for the non-certified group and low for the certified group. However, at the time the questionnaire was completed the converse was true. In addition, the non-certified group was low and the certified group was high on commitment to the home economics profession. The certified group tended to participate in teacher-directed group professional development activities just before the announcement of the certification program; whereas, the non-certified group tended not to participate in professional development activities. As such, there may be some positive correlation between certification status and the willingness of members of a profession to participate in professional development activities.

The relatively young evaluator profession (an occupation committed to assessing the strengths and weaknesses of programs, policies, personnel, products, and organizations to improve their effectiveness) is currently debating the topic of certification (Jones, 2001). A survey of its membership, which consisted of 500 members at the time, was conducted by Jones in 2001 to ascertain the need, effectiveness, and feasibility of enacting a certification system for professional evaluators. The responses revealed mixed attitudes and skepticism about the potential success of and/or the need for certification.

When Renninger (2007) conducted his study to examine the feasibility of a post-certification process for the recently emergent grant writing profession, the certification process was under development. Since that time, the Association of Grant Writers has

certified 751 of its members and adopted a renewal process based on the best practices of other professions that offer certification (American Association of Grant Writers, 2010; Renninger, 2007).

The broadest related study on the certification process was conducted by Gilley (1985). He collected data from seventy professional associations to identify the procedures and qualification criteria established, and the issues addressed in the development process to assist associations in exploring the feasibility of certification. The findings revealed commonality among the issues addressed and the criteria established to evaluate candidates. The ranked criteria identified were professional experience, successful completion of a written examination, and successful completion of a relevant program of study or a desired number of years of experience.

The most comprehensive and timely piece of literature on the certification process was *The Business of Certification: A Comprehensive Guide to Developing a Successful Program* (Knapp & Knapp, 2002). This book is a systematic guide to developing business, strategic, and marketing plans for professional certification based on the lessons learned by association executives who have designed certification programs and/or revamped existing certification programs. It also includes a comprehensive case study that demonstrates the process outlined.

The studies related to the certification process of other related professions provided a significant contribution to this study. They confirmed that there are commonalities in the issues debated and processes explored by similar organizations (Gilley, 1985). For example, skepticism and mixed attitudes were common among professions when exploring professional recognition (Jones, 2001; Mauldin, 1997;

Miranti, 1986). The studies also suggested that there might be a positive relationship between certification, job satisfaction, and participation in professional development activities (Grogan 1990; Peterson, 2008a).

Synthesis of the Literature

Like many other state associations at the time, Schiesz (1974) found that there was little agreement among Illinois financial aid directors about how to achieve professional status. However, he emphasized that this should not be interpreted to mean that the group thought credentialing was unimportant. Although the certification criteria and process recommended by the NASFAA 1974 Committee on Certification listed in Appendix C was adopted and implemented by a few states such as Florida, state associations discontinued their efforts a few years later (NASFAA, 1988).

Throughout the 37-year debate, the recurring major barriers to establishing and implementing a certification process for financial aid practitioners were grandfathering for seasoned practitioners, and legal issues (NASFAA, 1974, 1988, 2009). Financial aid programs have grown in size and increased in number over the past three decades. Financial aid practitioners must comply with many laws, regulations, and other requirements. Innovative technological changes and the electronic processes that institutions are required to participate in have changed the way student services are delivered. As such, seasoned financial aid practitioners were concerned that they have become too far removed from the program specific requirements and the day-to-day operations of the financial aid office to pass a required certification examination (NASFAA, 1988, 2009). Like the accounting profession (Karbens, 1985), there were

differences of opinions about the level of education and years of experience that should be required if a certification process is adopted (NASFAA, 2009).

The potential legal issues perceived as barriers to a certification process pertained to antitrust law, constitutional law, and tax law (Brooks, 1986; NASFAA, 1988, 2009). The possibility of antitrust lawsuits associated with an employer's reliance on the certification of an individual who failed to demonstrate competency on the job, employment implications for individuals who are refused certification, and/or the revocation of an individual's certification could be costly to the association. Lawsuits by individuals alleging that they were denied due process on appeal because of the lack of objective certification criteria that are consistently applied to all individuals was another area of concern. The third barrier related to legal issues was the tax implications of certification activities for the association. There was concern that NASFAA might have to be reclassified from an education association to a trade association and forgo its 501(3)(c) status as a tax exempt organization because it would be undertaking an activity typical of trade associations and other forms of businesses.

Common Core Standards for Financial Aid Practitioners

Formal training or academic preparation in a relevant field was one of the criteria established by the NASFAA Committee on Certification (NASFAA, 1974). Relevant fields of study identified were business administration, computer science, information systems, college student personnel, higher education administration, counseling, and other human behavior disciplines (Crissman & Martin, 2006). A study conducted by McFall (1999) in the related CFO profession revealed doctoral degrees in education administration were typically held by CFOs at larger institutions. Professional

certifications did not appear mandatory. While CFO's valued skills such as communication, problem solving, and team building in performing their positions as opposed to technical skills such as accounting and finance, many indicated that technical expertise, and work experience in accounting, auditing, and budgeting are more likely to aid an aspiring professional. However, it is also important to note that those who had doctoral degrees and certifications valued them more as a means to attaining and performing the CFO position than those who had not attained these credentials.

Although a curriculum for a Master's degree in financial aid was proposed by a Boston College study group, there is no formal degree program with a specialization in financial aid administration on any level. Based on formal discussions with financial aid administrators, Moore (1975) suggested the use of an academic model by developing a body of knowledge, basic core coursework, and a research methodology to advance the profession.

A survey of Arizona state financial aid administrators (Fenske & Bowman, 1981) revealed financial aid administrators viewed certification as a likely possibility in the near future. This sentiment was echoed by Simmons (1985). Moore (1975) also identified continued professional and personal growth as a major competency category in his model. Under Moore's model, achievement of this competency could be demonstrated by the financial aid professional's work experience; membership and involvement in professional groups; attendance at workshops, training programs, and conferences; conducting research; and publishing an article.

Fertig (2009) sums up the issue of general disagreement best in: *What Does this Piece of Paper Really Mean? An Inquiry into Certification Motivation*. In the wake of the increase in third-party competency certifications that many feel are essential to career success, he asserted that excessive use of certification credentials in their current form to gain prestige, rewards, and/or influence can undermine the effectiveness of the certification process as well as waste resources and effort. He questioned if the certification process is in fact achieving its intended goal, or if it is a waste of resources and effort. To answer this question, Fertig conducted a study using Self-Determination Theory (SDT) to test the relationship between certification-seeking motivations and obtaining certification, perceived job competence, and affective occupational commitment. The results revealed that autonomous motivation was more positively correlated with commitment to the human resource profession and obtaining certification than external motivation. In addition, the certification rate was five times higher for human resource association members than for non-members. According to Fertig, this suggests association membership may be a motivating factor to seeking certification, and is an area that warrants further research.

What Does This Mean for Financial Aid Administrators?

The financial aid specific literature related to certification was limited to anecdotal journal articles and committee reports. Numerous recommendations have been made in the literature about how to resolve this issue. As early as 1974, a NASFAA committee established certification criteria and recommended procedures for implementation once adopted. The recommendation to adopt a certification process was echoed by several other researchers (Delaney Jr. et al., 1974; Moore, 1975; Sanderson,

1971). However, potential legal issues prevented NASFAA from adopting the recommended certification process (NASFAA, 1974, 1988, 2009).

A few years later, Schiesz (1974) made a number of recommendations that the financial aid community has successfully implemented such as developing a code of ethics; promoting and providing professional development opportunities; and defining avenues for advancement within the profession. However, the profession has not implemented his recommendation to become more actively involved in financial aid research related to training and professional development. While NASFAA has successfully implemented the standardized training course recommended by Fenske & Bowman (1981) and some regional associations have implemented summer institutes as recommended by Simmons (1985), the association has failed to take action to fill the void in graduate-level training for financial aid practitioners as recommended by several researchers (Delaney Jr. et al., 1974; Schiesz 1974). Even more puzzling, is the absence of empirical research to support anecdotal evidence related to the opinions and concerns of financial aid practitioners about credentialing. While earlier literature suggested that the profession was not ready (Simmons, 1985), a significant amount of the literature reviewed implied or directly suggested a credentialing process as the next logical step for financial aid administrators (Allen, 1998; Fertig, 2009; Gilley, 1985; Mauldin, 1997; McFall, 1999; NASFAA, 1988, 1999, 2009).

These are the primary reasons why this study was important. It filled a void in the literature by providing systematically collected data related to the need and level of support for certification of the financial aid practitioners. It explored the need for a

graduate-level financial aid degree program; mandatory and voluntary training; internships; and CEUs for professional development activities. Most importantly, this study provided a broad based foundation of recommendations for future research based on the review of the literature and the themes that emerge from the open-ended responses in the archival data used. It serves as a basis for expanding research on training, professional development, and operational and office administration policy issues identified by financial aid practitioners.

The Evolution of the Financial Aid Profession

Step 1 – Formation of a Full-Time Occupation

Federal student aid based on need came into existence with the passage of the National Defense Education Act of 1958 (Brooks, 1986). The Act, which created the National Defense Student Loan program, was enacted to increase access to higher education, and was an outgrowth of the nation's response to the launching of Sputnik in the fall of 1957. Less than a decade later, during President Lyndon B. Johnson's administration, the Higher Education Act of 1965 authorized the Educational Opportunity Grant, Federal Work Study, and Guaranteed Student Loan programs (Gladieux, King, & Corrigan, 2005). What has come to be known as the core Title IV Student Financial Assistance programs, the Federal Pell Grant Program (formerly the Basic Educational Opportunity Grant) and State Student Incentive Grants, were authorized by the Higher Education Amendments of 1972 (NASFAA, 2000). Administration of these programs was left to participating institutions, which facilitated the trend of institutions designating individuals to be responsible for the administration of financial aid programs (Brooks,

1986). As a result, financial aid administration evolved into to full-time task (Sanderson, 1971) and the first step towards becoming a profession was completed.

Step 2 – Establishment of Professional Association

According to Brooks (1986), as the number of Title IV financial assistance programs began to increase, financial aid administrators began to form regional associations. By the end of 1966, the Midwestern Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (MASFAA), the Southwestern Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (SWASFAA), the Southern Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (SASFAA), and the Eastern Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (EASFAA) were formed, in that order. In the fall of the same year, at the urging of Alan Purdy, representatives of the financial aid community met and voted to form the National Student Financial Aid Council (NSFAC) to act as the formal unified political voice of financial aid administrators.

Step 3 – Establishment of a Mechanism for Advocacy

Alan Purdy was elected chair of the council and later became known as the Association's first president. The establishment of a professional association with membership requirements marked the second step towards becoming a profession. Brooks (1986) stated that Alan Purdy identified advocacy as the primary reason for the establishment of NASFAA, an important third step in the evolution of the financial aid profession that may be unique to higher education associations.

Step 4 – Stratification of Positions and Job Duties

The stratification of positions and job duties required by step four of the professionalization process began as early as 1968 (Sanderson, 1971) and continued to

evolve as financial aid programs have grown in number, dollar volume, and complexity. The results of the 2007 NASFAA Job Satisfaction Survey identified more than seven major functional roles over which positions and job duties are stratified for 2,037 survey respondents and are displayed in Table 1. It was the most recent snapshot of position and job duty stratification among financial aid administrators with the highest response rate prior to this study. The distribution across functional roles was as follows: (a) Chief financial aid administrator – 57.9%; (b) Second in command – 17.2%; (c) Associate/assistant director (not second in command) – 7.5%; (d) Manager/supervisor – 4.1%; (e) Counselor/advisor – 9.9%; (f) Data entry – 1.5%; (g) Receptionist/secretarial – 0.6%; and (h) Other staff – 1.3%. The chief financial aid administrator, seconds in command, and associate/assistant directors perform the core managerial tasks associated with the administration of Title IV programs while other tasks are delegated to supervisory, technical, and support staff. In addition, NASFAA has developed financial aid office position descriptions as a part of its Standards of Excellence Peer Review program that are recommended to postsecondary schools to assist with the organizational structure and stratification of duties in the financial aid office.

Step 5 – Change in Association Name or Establishment of a New Name

At the same time as financial aid programs began to grow in dollar volume and complexity, two new regional associations were formed. The Rocky Mountain Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (RMASFAA) was formed in 1968, and the Western Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (WASFAA) was formed in 1969. Step four towards becoming a profession was completed in the fall of that same year (1969) with the ratification of the constitution and by-laws by all six

Table 1

Distribution of 2007 NASFAA Job Satisfaction Survey Respondents by Functional Role

Functional role	Total respondents	Percent of total responses
Chief financial aid	1179	57.9%
Second in command	350	17.2%
Associate/assistant director	153	7.5%
Manager/supervisor	84	4.1%
Counselor/advisor	202	9.9%
Data entry	31	1.5%
Receptionist/secretarial	12	0.6%
Other staff	26	1.3%
Total	2,037	100%

Note: The total number of survey respondents was 2037. In addition, Associate/assistant directors consists of those survey respondents in a functional role other than second in command.

regions (MASFAA, SWASFAA, SASFAA, EASFAA, RMASFAA, and WASFAA), which changed the association's name from the National Student Financial Aid Council or NSFAC to its current name – the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators or NASFAA.

Step 6 – Period of Prolonged Political Agitation

The period of prolonged political agitation to obtain public power and support for financial aid administration began prior to the formation of NASFAA. In fact, according to Brown (1979), the idea that a professional organization governed by financial aid administrators might lead to increased campus recognition of the importance of the emerging profession was an underlying impetus for the formation of NASFAA. The goal to increase campus recognition of the importance of financial aid administration is one

that some financial aid practitioners perceive has not been obtained to date (NASFAA, 2008a, 2009; Peterson, 2008a).

Step 7 – Development of Training Controlled by the Association

The Association's first committee on professional development was established by its second president, Ken Wooten, in 1969 (Brooks, 1986). Initially, there was no reason for the Association to get involved in formal training activities since both College Scholarship Services (CSS) and American College Testing (ACT) provided training for financial aid administrators. However, the need for impartial training grew as competition increased between CSS and ACT. On September 1, 1979, NASFAA received a \$15,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Education to conduct three national training workshops. Since that time, NASFAA has played a major role in the training and professional development of financial aid practitioners, and currently has an entire division devoted to this function. Providing training and professional development materials to assist financial aid practitioners with compliance with applicable laws, regulations, and sub-regulatory guidance is the focus of the *Training and Regulatory Assistance* division. However, the financial aid community has yet to establish a common set of core standards outside of compliance with Title IV laws, regulations, and sub-regulatory guidance that all financial aid practitioners must meet.

Step 8 – Competition Between Similar Existing and New Occupations

Once NASFAA became actively involved in the training and professional development activities of financial aid administrators, a friendly rivalry began between the Association, and CSS and ACT who previously shared a monopoly on training activities and advocacy efforts (Brooks, 1986). As NASFAA expanded its training and

professional development services, it collaborated with other industry players such as lenders, guarantee agencies, software vendors, third party servicers, higher education associations, and the U. S. Department of Education (Huff, 1998). However, as the profession continued to evolve, collaborative relationships gradually became friendly rivalries. In addition, agitation currently exists between financial aid practitioners who provide services to students and families free of charge, and consultants who charge for similar services (NASFAA, 2008a). This ongoing competition is step eight of the professionalization process.

Step 9 – Establishment of a Process for On-Going Review of Financial Aid Operations

Discussion of a process for on-going review and sanctioning of financial aid office operations began with NASFAA's Committee on Accreditation (NASFAA, 1974). However, twenty-five years lapsed before the committee's vision became a reality by way of the Task Force on Standards of Excellence established and funded by the NASFAA Board of Directors during 1997-98 (NASFAA, 2007). The task force drafted a proposal for a program for a voluntary appraisal by experienced financial aid administrators of a postsecondary institution's financial aid delivery. The group identified assessment topics, established a review process, developed review worksheets, proposed an institutional fee structure, and beta tested the program. After successfully piloting the program at three institutions during 1998-99, the ninth step in the professionalization process was completed when the NASFAA Standards of Excellence

Peer Review Program was publicized and the first peer review was conducted in the fall of 1999.

Step 10 – Development and Promulgation of a Code of Ethics

The circumstances surrounding the completion of the tenth step in the professionalization process, development and promulgation of a code of ethics, are a bit ominous. New York Attorney General, Andrew M. Cuomo began a high profile investigation into the lending practices and possible inducements between student loan lenders, and colleges and universities in early 2007 (Peterson, 2008b). Amidst the investigations, colleges and universities scrambled to review policies and procedures, and guard against the slightest appearance of impropriety. In the absence of definitive guidance from the U.S. Department of Education, the student loan industry attempted to self-regulate itself. At the same time, higher education associations reviewed and refined their codes of conducts and ethical standards. Although NASFAA had previously adopted a statement of ethical principals in April of 1999, Cuomo's investigations prompted its Board of Directors to adopt a code of conduct in May 2007. The board also issued a statement reminding its members that the primary goal of the financial aid administrator is to help students achieve their educational potential by providing appropriate financial resources (NASFAA, 2007). The NASFAA statement of ethical principles is reviewed and updated as needed.

Step 11 – Establishment of a Formal Academic Training Program

A financial aid curriculum model for training comprised of four broad concentrations that focused on serving the client was suggest by Simmons in 1985. Given the rapidly changing financial aid regulations to which schools must comply, he

suggested a curriculum offered in a summer institute setting. Such a setting would allow the participants to focus on the requirements effective at that point in time. NASFAA's *CORE* In-Service Instructor Training Modules are an outgrowth of Simmons' suggestion.

NASFAA's *CORE* In-Service Training is a comprehensive set of instructional materials designed by NASFAA for training financial aid practitioners with less than two years of experience (NASFAA, 2008b). In-service training is instruction provided to help employees who have already started the job develop skills in a specialization or occupation. *CORE* is comprised of 13 modules that cover financial aid administration from A to Z, beginning with a description of the federal student assistance programs and concluding with information about the special discretion financial aid administrators can use to help families under special circumstances. There are four supplemental guides that explain the application, recertification, cash management, and record keeping and reporting requirements. The training materials are updated annually based on changes to the Title IV laws, regulations, and sub-regulatory guidance.

CORE is designed for structured instructor led training for both small and large groups. Each *CORE* module contains an instructor's guide, accompanying trainee handouts, and a PowerPoint presentation. The training materials are currently used as the basis of the curriculum for annual financial aid summer institutes and boot camps that are conducted by state and regional associations. In addition, the training materials are used by financial aid practitioners in their offices as the basis of on the job training. *CORE* is available on CD-ROM only (NASFAA, 2008b).

Although a curriculum for a Master's degree in financial aid was proposed by a Boston College study group (Delaney Jr. et al., 1974), there is currently no formal degree

program with a specialization in financial aid administration on any level. Based on formal discussions with financial aid administrators, Moore (1975) suggested the use of an academic model by developing a body of knowledge, basic core coursework, and a research methodology to advance the profession. Moore (1975) also identified continued professional and personal growth as a major competency category in his model. Under Moore's model, achievement of this competency is demonstrated by the financial aid professional's work experience; membership and involvement in professional groups; attendance at workshops, training programs, and conferences; conducting research; and publishing an article.

According to Dr. A. Dallas Martin (personnel communication, September 27, 2011), the Colorado State College (now the University of Northern Colorado) offered an Education Specialist Degree in Financial Aid Administration from the fall of 1968 until the summer of 1972. The degree program has not been offered since its initiator and the institution's Director of Financial Aid at the time, Harry E. Collins, retired. Nevertheless, it is important to note that master's and doctoral degrees in higher education with an emphasis in administration, leadership, public policy, and/or student services are available. With the development and implementation of NASFAA's *CORE* In-Service Training Modules, and the availability of master's and doctoral degrees in related fields, the final step that remains in both Caplow's theory and the proposed higher education

theory of professionalization in Table 2 is the establishment of a core set of standards that all active financial aid practitioners must meet.

Step 12 – Establishment of a Core Set of Standards

Financial aid administration is a profession theoretically, figuratively, and literally, under Caplow's (1954) theory of professionalization, which is summarized in the first column of Table 2. That is if, and only if, he would consider the existing Title IV law, regulations, and sub-regulatory guidance a core set of standards. Whether or not Wilensky (1964) would consider financial aid administration a profession under his theory, which is summarized in the second column of Table 2, is debatable since his theory requires the establishment of a university-level training program.

As mentioned previously, there is no university level program with an emphasis in financial aid administration at the current time. Since NASFAA's *CORE* is not a university level financial aid program, it does not appear to satisfy this requirement under Wilensky's theory. However, perhaps the existence of university level programs in related fields that are acceptable by the higher education industry to satisfy the education and experience requirements for financial aid professional staff (Crissman & Martin, 2006) may be used to satisfy this requirement. If so, then financial aid administration would be considered a profession under Wilensky's theory.

Table 2

Theories of Professionalization – Steps Required Under Each Theory

Steps	Caplow's Theory	Wilensky's Theory	New Hybrid Theory
1. Full time task-1966		✓	✓
2. Professional Association-1966	✓	✓	✓
3. Advocacy-1966			✓
4. Job stratification-1968		✓	✓
5. Name change-1969	✓		✓
6. Political Agitation-1971	✓	✓	✓
7. Training program(s)-1979	✓		✓
8. Competition-1979		✓	✓
9. On-going review process-1999			✓
10. Code of Ethics-1999/2007	✓	✓	✓
11. University training program-1968		✓	✓
12. Core set of standards	✓		✓

Both *CORE* and the existence of university level programs in related fields (i.e. Student Personnel Administration, Higher Education Policy and Leadership, and Higher Education Administration) satisfy the establishment of a university level program under the new hybrid theory of professionalization summarized in the last column of Table 2. However, there is a final step that remains to be completed under the hybrid theory before financial aid administration can be considered a full-fledge profession – the establishment of a common core set of standards that all practicing financial aid administrators must meet outside of current Title IV law, regulations, and sub-regulatory guidance. Certification, which for the purpose of this study is defined as the establishment of a

voluntary process by an organization to attest that an individual satisfies certain qualifications and/or meets a predetermined standard, is the ideal method for satisfying this requirement under the new higher education theory of professionalization.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Epistemology

This non-experimental, descriptive exploratory study (Creswell, 2003) using archival data was conducted from a constructivism paradigm (Creswell, 2003; Crotty, 1998) to: (a) examine the perceived benefits and detriments of certification of financial aid administrators; (b) determine the level of support for certification among NASFAA members; (c) identify the most favorable approach to achieving certification; (d) determine the percentage of NASFAA members that would pursue certification if a process were adopted; and (e) identify additional information needed to inform future policy decisions on certification. The underlying premise of constructivism is the human world is different from the physical world and must be studied differently because human beings have the capacity to construct reality (Patton, 2002). It is the lens through which the researcher examined the research problem.

The rationale for the selection of this knowledge claim is, since there is currently no research data specific to the financial aid profession available on this topic, the survey participants responded to the questions posed based on their own experiences; and their historical, social, and political perspectives on certification of financial aid administrators. It allows for multiple subjective participant meanings when responding to the open-ended survey questions (Creswell, 2003). In addition, it allows for theory generation (Creswell, 2003); hence, the use of the hybrid theory of professionalization used to describe financial aid administration within the social, historical, and political context of the occupation as it continues to evolve into a full fledge profession.

Research Design

Data Sources

Participants. The case unit for this study was individual financial aid practitioners grouped by type of institution, occupation, functional role, level of education, and years of experience. The population for this study was the NASFAA membership. Data from the Professional Recognition survey administered by NASFAA was reviewed and analyzed to ascertain the position of the membership as a whole on certification of financial aid practitioners.

Researcher. Disclosure of researcher perspectives and biases is important to the integrity of a study. The researcher for this study was a 46-year-old African American female pursuing a doctoral degree in higher education. The researcher has approximately twenty-five years of experience in higher education in both accounting and the administration of financial aid programs. She also served on various committees and task forces related to financial aid public policy; systems development and technology implementation; and fiscal operations of colleges and universities. She was instrumental in the continued development and success of NASFAA's Standards of Excellence Peer Review program, and has served as a peer reviewer and the program's lead report writer. During her experience, she has worked both directly and indirectly with students; parents; college and university administrators; state and federal legislators; and others who have a stake in access, choice, and affordability in higher education.

Data Collection. The study focused on the current perceived benefits of certification held by financial aid administrators. In addition, the researcher identified the level of support for certification that exists among the NASFAA membership, and the

components for a certification process identified by the membership, if NASFAA should decide to adopt certification in the future.

Permission was obtained from NASFAA to use the data from the electronically administered survey of the NASFAA membership (NASFAA, 2010). The data collection was a descriptive analysis of the demographics of the survey respondents; data related to the benefits and level of support for professional recognition; the desired components of a professional recognition process for financial aid practitioners; and the percentage of the survey respondents that would participate in a professional recognition process, if it were an option. The data collected was maintained on a NASFAA server that was backed-up nightly and periodically burned to a compact disk, and a computer hard drive at a separate location that was backed up frequently onto a jump drive and stored at a separate location.

Both quantitative data and responses to open-ended questions collected from the electronic survey administered to NASFAA *Today's News* subscribers in March 2010 using the survey instrument listed in Appendix D was analyzed. The survey began on March 16, 2010 and closed at midnight, March 31, 2010. Survey participants were asked to forward the survey link to other financial aid practitioners at their institutions to ensure the entire membership had the opportunity to respond, and to increase the validity of the results.

Instrument Development. The survey instrument was designed by the members on the NASFAA 2009-10 Institutional Program Management Committee, and piloted by members of both the 2009-10 NASFAA Institutional Program Management and Research committees. In the capacity as staff liaison to the Institutional Program Management

Committee, the researcher used the research questions for this study as a basis to develop a draft survey instrument. The draft survey instrument was reviewed by the Institutional Program Management Committee who submitted comments via email. Changes to the order and structure of the survey questions to which there was consensus were made, and a second draft was distributed to the committee. All committee members, except for the researcher who was tasked with drafting the survey instrument, were given the opportunity to provide feedback on each research question during a series of seven conference calls over a four-month period. During each conference call, revised questions were read aloud and each committee member was again asked to provide feedback on the question. This process continued until consensus was reached on all survey questions and a final survey was approved by the committee.

After the survey instrument was finalized, it was entered into the Vovici software and pilot tested by committee members. The survey was revised and retested six times. Next, the survey link was distributed to members of the NASFAA Research committee for review and testing. Additional revisions were made based on feedback from the Research Committee and the final survey instrument was subsequently approved by both the Institutional Program Management Committee and the Research Committee.

Survey Instrument. The survey instrument used to collect the archival data for this study appears in Appendix D. It is divided into four sections that were used to collect responses to demographic, quantitative, and open-ended research questions. The first section contains demographic questions that asked respondents to indicate their institution or organization type; institution or organization location; number of years of experience as a financial aid practitioner; highest level of education achieved; job title;

and functional role. The second section contains quantitative questions about the need and level of support for professional recognition using a five point Likert scale.

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they agree (1), somewhat agree (2), had no opinion (3), somewhat disagree (4), or disagree (5) with the seventeen statements listed. Seven statements (numbered 1-2, and 4-8) asked about the need for professional recognition. One statement (number 3) asked about the benefits of a professional recognition process. Four statements (numbered 14-17) addressed the level of support for professional recognition only. Four questions (numbered 9-12) asked about both the level of support and professional recognition process, and one question (numbered 13) addressed the phase-in period or grandfathering for a professional recognition process.

The third section of the survey contains one open-ended and several closed-ended questions in a pick-list about the elements of a common core set of standards for financial aid administrators (e.g. level of education, voluntary training, and continuing education credits, years of experience, an examination, etc.); and the level and duration of recognition. The fourth and final section of the survey consists of open-ended questions about additional features of a professional recognition process; why respondents are not in favor of such a process; and additional comments and suggestions about professional recognition of financial aid administrators in general.

Validity of Design

In qualitative research design, the issues of validity, trustworthiness, and reliability of the responses based upon the identification of the researcher as a financial aid practitioner must be addressed. For the purpose of this study, validity, trustworthiness, and reliability was assured by (a) utilizing the NASFAA Institutional

Program Management Committee as research team members for instrument development; (b) pilot testing of the survey instrument used to collect the archival data; (c) member checking; (d) coding of open-ended survey responses to identify themes and patterns in the responses; and (e) constant comparison of all data collected (Creswell, 2003, 2007). In addition, the researcher kept a data diary to help identify and note inconsistencies between the actual responses provided by participants and preconceived responses expected by the researcher. This helped minimize researcher bias when interpreting responses. The ultimate goal was to ensure that all participants' voices were heard.

Justification of Design

The researcher's knowledge claim is that of the constructivism as defined by Creswell (2003) who cited Crotty (1998). Constructivism allowed for the examination of different complex views to the open-ended survey questions as opposed to narrowing them to a few categories or ideas (Creswell, 2003). It allowed the researcher to take a holistic approach to the research problem and inductively develop the hybrid theory proposed by drawing on both the literature, and the quantitative and open-ended responses in the archival data used for this study (Creswell, 2003).

Data Analysis

The first step in the data analysis process was to proofread the data in the Vovici software to identify and target data items that were missing or needed further attention. Next, both the Vovici software and SPSS were used to validate the data and conduct data screening to identify and target variables that needed to be deleted, transformed, recoded, and/or recomputed. The response to statement number eight in the second section of the

survey (*There is no need to set standard beyond what is currently in the administrative capability regulations.*) was recoded to reverse the scale to calculate the mean. Several respondents provided demographic information only (452) and a few cases (10) contained invalid data; as such, these 462 cases were excluded from the data analysis.

Next, descriptive statistics were calculated, including response frequencies based on institution type, years of student aid experience, level of education, job title, and functional role. The SPSS *Mean Comparisons* procedure was used to analyze the data and the SPSS *Crosstabs* procedure was used to determine if there were any relationships between categorical variables.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

Survey Population

The population for this study was the 22,203 members of NASFAA. The 20,285 institutional members represent 91% of the total membership, and the 1,918 constituent members represent 9% of the total membership. There were approximately 6,632 Title IV postsecondary institutions as of the fall 2009 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Of this number, 4,409 were degree-granting institutions and 2,223 were non-degree granting institutions. Approximately 2,683 of these institutions are currently members of NASFAA (NASFAA, 2011). This means that approximately 40% of all institutions that participate in Title IV programs were represented in the survey population as indicated in Table 3.

The NASFAA membership represents 63% of the total public and 31% of the total private postsecondary schools that participate in Title IV financial assistance programs. Approximately 62% of the private schools are from the not-for-profit sector and approximately 11% are from the for-profit sector. The NASFAA membership represents 7% of the total non-degree-granting Title IV post-secondary schools. Approximately 9% of these schools are from the public sector, and 7% of these schools are from the private sector. Around 10% of the private non-degree-granting schools are from the not-for-profit sector and 6% are from the for-profit sector. In addition, the NASFAA membership represents 57% of the total Title IV degree-granting institutions, 51% of all two-year Title IV postsecondary schools, and 61% of all four-year colleges and above that participate in Title IV programs.

Table 3

Comparison Distribution of Survey Population by Institution and Type of Control

Institution type and control	Total Title IV institutions	Total NASFAA members	Percent of Title IV institutions
Total	6,662	2,683 ^a	40%
Public	1,997	1,264	63%
Private	4,635	1,419	31%
Not-for-profit	1,809	1,119	62%
For-profit	2,826	300	11%
Non-degree	2,223	152	7%
Public	321	28	9%
Private	1,902	124	7%
Not-for-profit	180	18	10%
For-profit	1,722	106	6%
Degree	4,409	2,531	57%
2-year degree	1,690	866	51%
Public	1,024	690	67%
Private	666	176	26%
Not-for-profit	92	72	78%
For-profit	574	104	18%
4-year and above ^b	2,719	1,665	61%
Public	652	546	84%
Private	2,067	1,119	54%
Not-for-profit	1,537	1,029	67%
For-profit	530	90	17%

^a Total NASFAA members as of October 21, 2011.

^b The breakdown of the 131 graduate and professional NASFAA member schools included in the sub-category 4-year and above was imputed based on total number of Title IV schools for each category.

Survey Respondents

There were 3,219 survey respondents, of which 96% were institutional members and 4% were constituent members. The respondents represent 14% of the NASFAA membership. The overall composition of the respondents was different from the composition of the actual membership population mentioned previously (91% institutional members and 9% constituent members). Approximately 14% of the respondents (452) provided demographic information only, and 10 respondents provided invalid answers to some of the survey questions. These cases, which totaled 462 (347 institutional members and 115 constituent members), were excluded from the data analysis. This changed the sample size to 2,756, and the overall composition of the respondents to 98% institutional members and 2% constituent members. While this composition is closer to the composition of the NASFAA membership, institutional members are slightly over-represented and constituent members are slightly under-represented in the data analysis. Nevertheless, given the population size of 22,203 and a sample size of 2,756, the margin of error is ± 1.75 at the 95% confidence level. Therefore, the chance that the survey results do not reflect the opinions of the NASFAA membership is less than 5%.

The demographic information collected included: (a) type and control of institution, (b) location by state, (c) years of experience in student aid, (d) level of education, (e) job title, and (f) functional role. Responses were received from every state, Guam, and the Federated States of Micronesia. Table 4 displays the response rate by functional role. Note that chief financial aid administrator was the mode for this demographic variable with a response rate of 37.3%. Table 5 provides a comparison of

the responses collected to the functional role question on the 2007 NASFAA Satisfaction Survey to the responses collected in the archival data used for this study. The notable changes were the: (a) 13% decrease in chief financial aid administrators, (b) 329%

Table 4

Distribution of Survey Respondents by Functional Role

Functional role	Total respondents	Percent of total responses
Chief financial aid administrator	1,029	37.3%
Second in command	371	13.5%
Systems manager	80	2.9%
Compliance officer	135	4.9%
Program manager	280	10.2%
Fiscal officer/technician	43	1.6%
Program assistant	46	1.7%
Application processing	214	7.8%
Customer service	145	5.3%
Data entry	7	.3%
Administrative assistant	32	1.2%
Other staff	374	13.6%
Total	2,756	100%

Note: The percent of total responses may not total 100% due to rounding.

increase in the number of managers, (c) 77% decrease in staff dedicated exclusively to data entry, (d) 167% increase in respondents in the roles of receptionist/secretary, and (e) 1504% increase in the number of respondents functioning in other roles not listed as an option for this survey question. In addition, there was a 35.3% increase in the overall

total number of respondents from the 2007 Job Satisfaction Survey to 2010 Professional Recognition Survey.

Response rates for the job title, type and control, and level of education demographics appear in Table 6 thru Table 8. Note the mode for the job title

Table 5

Comparison Distribution of Survey Respondents by Functional Role

Functional role	2007 job satisfaction survey respondents	2010 professional recognition survey respondents	Percent change
Chief financial aid administrator	1,179	1,029	-12.7%
Second in command	350	371	6.0%
Associate/assistant director ^a	153	--	--
Compliance officer ^b	--	135	--
Manager/supervisor	84	360 ^c	328.6%
Counselor/advisor ^d	202	--	28.7%
Data entry	31	7	-77.4%
Program assistants ^e	--	46	0.6%
Application processing	--	214	--
Customer service ^f	--	145	0.6%
Receptionist/secretarial	12	32 ^g	166.7%
Other staff	26	417 ^h	1,503.8%
Total	2,037	2,756	35.3%

^a Associate/assistant directors consists of those survey respondents in a functional role other than second in command. It was not listed as an option for functional role on the 2010 survey; however, it is listed as an option for job title.

^b Compliance officer was not listed as an option for functional role on the 2007 survey.

^c Includes 80 systems managers and 280 program managers.

^d Counselor/advisor was not listed as an option for functional role on the 2010 survey.

^e Program assistant was not listed as an option for functional role on the 2007 survey.

^f Customer service representative was not listed as an option for functional role on the 2007 survey.

^g Includes administrative assistants and customer service staff.

^h Includes 43 fiscal technicians and 374 other staff.

demographic variable in Table 6 was financial aid director with a response rate of 34.7%. The assistant/associate director category had a response rate of 23.2%, and the counselor/advisor/coordinator group had a slightly lower response rate of 21.4%.

The response rate for survey participants functioning as the chief financial aid administrator (37.3%) listed in Table 4 is consistent with the response rate of the survey participants with the corresponding title of director (34.7%) listed in Table 6. The 1.5% difference in the two rates may be attributed to the fact that 111 survey respondents with titles such as president, owner, vice president, dean, assistant/associate dean,

Table 6

Distribution of Survey Respondents by Job Title

Job title	Total respondents	Percent of total responses
President/owner/CEO/CFO	7	.3%
Vice President/assistant VP	85	3.1%
Dean	24	.9%
Assistant/associate Dean	45	1.6%
Director	955	34.7%
Assistant/associate director	639	23.2%
Manager/supervisor	82	3.0%
Systems analyst/operator/tech	36	1.3%
Counselor/advisor/coordinator	591	21.4%
Other professional	60	2.2%
Receptionist/clerk/processor	22	.8%
Other clerical	14	.5%
Other industry professionals	196	7.1%
Total	2,756	100.0%

Note: The percent of total responses may not total 100% due to rounding.

assistant/associate director, counselor/advisor/coordinator, and other professional staff indicated that they function in the role of chief financial aid administrator.

The mode for the institution type and control demographic variable was public institutions with a response rate of 45.5% and is listed in Table 7. Recall at first glance, the mode for individual respondents by type of institution in Table 3 appeared to be private institutions . However, the researcher was not able to determine the actual mode due the structure of the survey question and the lack of comparable data for this statistic for the time when the survey was conducted.

Table 7

Distribution of Survey Respondents by Institution Type and Control

Type and control	Total respondents	Percent of total responses	Percent of individual NASFAA members
Public	1,255	45.5%	12.1%
Private	929	33.7%	13.3%
Proprietary	179	6.5%	7.2%
Two-year ^a	571	20.7%	--
Four-year ^b	882	32.0%	--
Graduate/Professional ^c	552	20.0%	117%
Other	125	4.5%	6.5%

Note: The number of respondents does not total 2,756 and the percent of responses does not equal 100% because respondents were allowed to select more than one answer to this survey question.

^a The number of individual NASFAA members representing two-year institutions was not available for the point in time when this study was conducted.

^b The number of individual NASFAA members representing four-year institutions was not available for the point in time when this study was conducted.

^c Because the survey question asked respondents to select all categories that apply, some respondents selected both the four-year and graduate/professional category. As a result, the percent of individual NASFAA members for this category exceeds 100%.

The mode for the level of education demographic variable listed in Table 8 was master's degree with a response rate of 43%. Further analysis revealed all respondents had at a minimum of a high school diploma or its equivalent, while over 87% had a bachelor's degree or higher at the time of the survey.

Table 8

Distribution of Survey Respondents by Level of Education

Level of education	Total respondents	Percent of total responses
Doctoral or other terminal degree	83	3.0%
Masters level degree	1185	43.0%
Bachelors level degree	1145	41.5%
Associate level degree	157	5.7%
Postsecondary certificate	42	1.5%
High school diploma or equivalent	144	5.2%
Less than high school	0	0.0%
Total	2,756	100.0%

Note: The percent of total responses may not total 100% due to rounding.

The response rates for the years of experience demographic variable appear in Table 9. The range of possible responses to this survey question was 0 to 30 years or more of experience. Eight respondents indicated they had no financial aid experience. Although this is not an unusual occurrence in the financial aid industry, these cases were initially targeted for exclusion from the data analysis. However, a review of the descriptive statistics excluding the cases showed no change in the median or mode, a .05 increase in the mean, and no noteworthy changes in skewness or kurtosis. Therefore, these cases were not excluded from the data analysis.

Table 9

Distribution of Survey Respondents by Years of Experience as a Financial Aid Practitioner

Years of experience	Total respondents	Percent of total responses
30+ years	312	11.3%
25 to 29 years	389	14.1%
20 to 24 years	313	11.4%
15 to 19 years	385	14.0%
10 to 14 years	459	16.7%
5 to 9 years	481	17.5%
1 to 4 years	377	13.6%
Less than 1 year	32	1.2%
None	8	.3%
Total	2,756	100.0%

Note: The percent of total responses may not total 100% due to rounding.

The measure for the years of experience variable was not a pure continuous scale since there is a ceiling of 30 or more years of experience. Despite this fact, the responses appear to be normally distributed (*skewness* = .146) with a median of 17, a mean of 17.26, and a standard deviation of 9.297. Although there is some negative kurtosis (-1.250), the variable was not targeted for transformation because the skewness was within the acceptable range of ± 1 established for this study, and the mean was within published ranges (NASFAA, 2008a).

Survey Responses

Table 10 and Table 11 contain the response rates for each quantitative survey question asked about the need, benefit, level of support, and components a certification process using a 5-point Likert scale. Table 10 lists the frequencies of the number of

Table 10

Frequency of Responses – Likert Scale Questions (N = 2,756)

	Question	Agree	Somewhat Agree	No Opinion	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree
1N.	There is a public need to ensure the accountability of financial aid administrators as fiduciaries.	1407	825	204	203	117
2N.	There is a public need to ensure accountability of financial aid administrators to protect the public interest.	1424	824	168	213	127
3B.	Professional recognition would increase the stature of and respect for the financial aid profession.	1555	703	161	206	131
4N.	Credentialing is necessary to ensure financial aid administrators have a certain skill set and a certain level of expertise.	1066	912	167	377	234
5N.	A mechanism is needed to ensure financial aid administrators pledge to uphold and keep the NASFAA statement of professional ethics.	982	801	362	371	240
6N.	Self-regulating the financial aid profession is necessary to ensure institutional administrative capability.	995	972	318	295	176
7N.	Self-regulating the financial aid profession is necessary to prevent other entities from implementing additional regulations.	955	888	443	287	183
8N.	There is no need to set standards beyond what is currently in the administrative capability regulations.	480	764	467	755	290
9SP.	I am in favor of establishing a recognized curriculum in financial aid administration.	1113	966	278	227	172
10SP.	I am in favor of mandatory basic training such as a summer institute or boot camp for entry-level professionals.	1239	790	157	336	234
11SP.	I am in favor of a mandatory internship in a financial aid office for entry-level professionals.	527	647	354	697	531
12SP.	I am in favor of voluntary credentialing for financial aid administrators.	1206	927	295	205	123
13P.	If a credentialing process is adopted, there should be a phase in period for current practitioners.	1830	573	208	90	55
14S.	I would participate in a voluntary credentialing process if one were available.	1454	712	309	122	159
15S.	I would encourage others to participate in a voluntary credentialing process if one were available.	1436	730	354	116	120
16S.	I would pursue a degree in financial aid administration if a program were available.	740	596	471	384	565
17S.	I would encourage others to pursue a degree in financial aid administration if a program were available.	923	734	532	269	298

Table 11

Response Percentages – Likert Scale Questions

	Question	Agree	Somewhat Agree	No Opinion	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree
1N.	There is a public need to ensure the accountability of financial aid administrators as fiduciaries.	51.1%	29.9%	7.4%	7.4%	4.2%
2N.	There is a public need to ensure accountability of financial aid administrators to protect the public interest.	51.7%	29.9%	6.1%	7.7%	4.6%
3B.	Professional recognition would increase the stature of and respect for the financial aid profession.	56.4%	25.5%	5.8%	7.5%	4.8%
4N.	Credentialing is necessary to ensure financial aid administrators have a certain skill set and a certain level of expertise.	38.7%	33.1%	6.1%	13.7%	8.5%
5N.	A mechanism is needed to ensure financial aid administrators pledge to uphold and keep the NASFAA statement of professional ethics.	35.6%	29.1%	13.1%	13.5%	8.7%
6N.	Self-regulating the financial aid profession is necessary to ensure institutional administrative capability.	36.1%	35.3%	11.5%	10.7%	6.4%
7N.	Self-regulating the financial aid profession is necessary to prevent other entities from implementing additional regulations.	34.7%	32.2%	16.1%	10.4%	6.6%
8N.	There is no need to set standards beyond what is currently in the administrative capability regulations.	17.4%	27.7%	16.9%	27.4%	10.5%
9SP.	I am in favor of establishing a recognized curriculum in financial aid administration.	40.4%	35.1%	10.1%	8.2%	6.2%
10SP.	I am in favor of mandatory basic training such as a summer institute or boot camp for entry-level professionals.	45.0%	28.7%	5.7%	12.2%	8.5%
11SP.	I am in favor of a mandatory internship in a financial aid office for entry-level professionals.	19.1%	23.5%	12.8%	25.3%	19.3%
12SP.	I am in favor of voluntary credentialing for financial aid administrators.	43.8%	33.6%	10.7%	7.4%	4.5%
13P.	If a credentialing process is adopted, there should be a phase in period for current practitioners.	66.4%	20.8%	7.5%	3.3%	2.0%
14S.	I would participate in a voluntary credentialing process if one were available.	52.8%	25.8%	11.2%	4.4%	5.8%
15S.	I would encourage others to participate in a voluntary credentialing process if one were available.	52.1%	26.5%	12.8%	4.2%	4.4%
16S.	I would pursue a degree in financial aid administration if a program were available.	26.9%	21.6%	17.1%	13.9%	20.5%
17S.	I would encourage others to pursue a degree in financial aid administration if a program were available.	33.5%	26.6%	19.3%	9.8%	10.8%

respondents who agreed, somewhat agreed, had no opinion, somewhat disagreed, or disagreed with each statement. Table 11 lists the same statements and categories with the responses listed as percentages. The letters that follow each question number designate the category to which each research question was assigned for the purpose of this study. They were as follows: (a) N = need; (b) B = benefit; (c) S = level of support; and (d) P = certification process component. Some questions were assigned to multiple categories.

Figure 1 displays the aggregated percentages of the responses to the questions designated to collect data on the need, benefit, and level of support in section two of the survey using the 5-point Likert scale that we discussed previously. Overall, 70% of the respondents agreed (41.3%), or somewhat agreed (28.5%) that there is a need for some type of mechanism for establishing a basic core set of standards the all financial aid practitioners must meet. Approximately 11.2% had no opinion on the matter, and 19% somewhat disagreed (11.0%) or disagreed (8.0%).

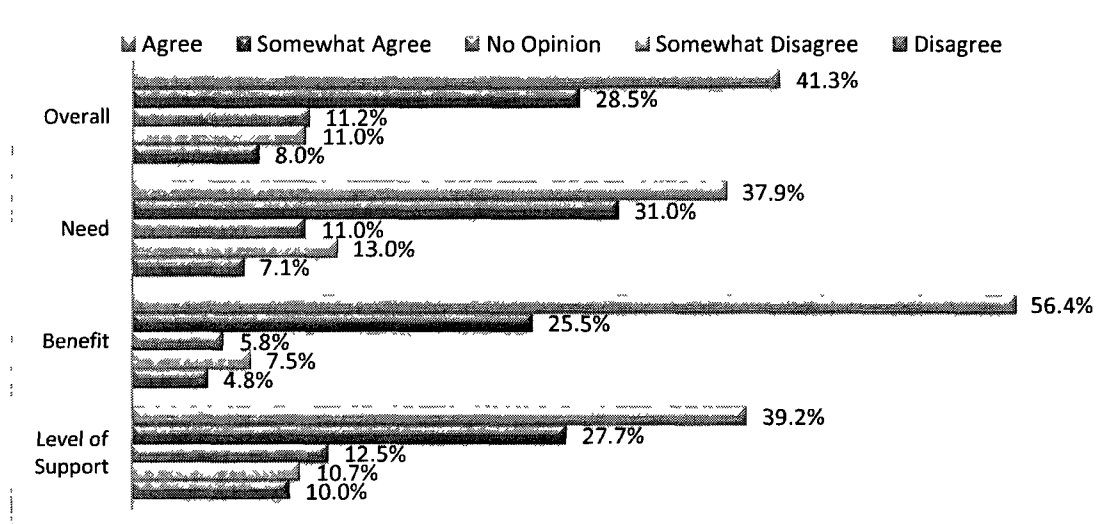


Figure 1. Overall need, benefit, and level of support for certification.

Descriptive statistics for each quantitative survey question that asked about the need, benefit, level of support, and components a certification process using a 5-point Likert scale are listed in Table 12. The distribution of the means for six of the questions appeared to be normally distributed (4-8, and 17) since they were within the acceptable range of skewness ($skewness = \pm 1$) established for this study. Another six questions (1-3 and 13-15) had both positive skewness and positive kurtosis. Two questions had some negative kurtosis associated with them (questions 11 and 16), and the remaining questions (9, 10, and 12) were positively skewed. Nevertheless, none of these variables were targeted for transformation to avoid distorting the data, and to minimize the risk of others misinterpreting the results.

The need for a phase-in period for current practitioners if a certification process is adopted is the statement that respondents agreed with most ($M = 1.54$; $s = .914$). It was the smallest mean with the lowest amount of standard deviation. The public need to ensure the accountability of financial aid practitioners as fiduciaries was the next statement on which respondents agreed with most ($M = 1.84$; $s = 1.112$). Support for a mandatory internship requirement for entry-level financial aid practitioners was the statement with the highest mean ($M = 3.02$), but there appears to be a lack of agreement between respondents ($s = 1.423$). It is also the statement for which the responses varied most ($s^2 = 2.024$).

Need for Certification

As mentioned previously, the survey questions that address the need for certification are designated by the letter “N” following the question number in Table 10, Table 11, and Table 12. Overall, 69% of the respondents either agreed (37.9%) or

Table 12

Descriptive Statistics for Quantitative Survey Questions – Likert Scale

Question		Statistics where N = 2756				
		M	s	s ²	Skewness	Kurtosis
1N.	There is a public need to ensure the accountability of financial aid administrators as fiduciaries.	1.84	1.112	1.236	1.387	1.094
2N.	There is a public need to ensure accountability of financial aid administrators to protect the public interest.	1.84	1.129	1.275	1.414	1.107
3B.	Professional recognition would increase the stature of and respect for the financial aid profession.	1.79	1.142	1.304	1.493	1.245
4N.	Credentialing is necessary to ensure financial aid administrators have a certain skill set and a certain level of expertise.	2.20	1.311	1.718	.894	-.469
5N.	A mechanism is needed to ensure financial aid administrators pledge to uphold and keep the NASFAA statement of professional ethics.	2.31	1.310	1.717	.712	-.702
6N.	Self-regulating the financial aid profession is necessary to ensure institutional administrative capability.	2.16	1.206	1.454	.932	-.115
7N.	Self-regulating the financial aid profession is necessary to prevent other entities from implementing additional regulations.	2.22	1.214	1.473	.812	-.309
8N.	There is no need to set standards beyond what is currently in the administrative capability regulations.	3.14	1.284	1.649	.069	-1.195
9SP.	I am in favor of establishing a recognized curriculum in financial aid administration.	2.05	1.181	1.394	1.117	.349
10SP.	I am in favor of mandatory basic training such as a summer institute or boot camp for entry-level professionals.	2.11	1.322	1.748	1.005	-.301
11SP.	I am in favor of a mandatory internship in a financial aid office for entry-level professionals.	3.02	1.423	2.024	-.034	-1.379
12SP.	I am in favor of voluntary credentialing for financial aid administrators.	1.95	1.114	1.242	1.192	.668
13P.	If a credentialing process is adopted, there should be a phase in period for current practitioners.	1.54	.914	.835	1.930	3.440
14S.	I would participate in a voluntary credentialing process if one were available.	1.85	1.146	1.313	1.401	1.144
15S.	I would encourage others to participate in a voluntary credentialing process if one were available.	1.82	1.086	1.179	1.372	1.236
16S.	I would pursue a degree in financial aid administration if a program were available.	2.80	1.486	2.209	.236	-1.357
17S.	I would encourage others to pursue a degree in financial aid administration if a program were available.	2.38	1.323	1.749	.659	-.701

somewhat agreed (31.0%) that there is a need for some sort of certification process. Approximately, 20% disagreed (7.1%) or somewhat disagreed (13.0%), while 11% indicated they had no opinion on the matter. Protecting the public interest ($M = 1.84$), ensuring accountability ($M = 1.84$), and self-regulating to ensure administrative capability ($M = 2.16$) were the top three statements that survey respondents agreed with most. Respondents were most ambivalent about the need to set standards beyond what is currently in the administrative capability regulations for Title IV financial aid programs ($M = 3.14$).

Protecting the public interest was the statement presidents ($M = 1.14$), assistant/associate directors ($M = 1.83$), managers/supervisors ($M = 1.54$), counselors/advisors/coordinators ($M = 1.81$), other professional staff ($M = 1.65$), receptionist/processors ($M = 1.68$), and other stakeholders ($M = 1.49$) in the financial aid industry agreed with most. On the other hand, ensuring the accountability of practitioners as fiduciaries was the statement vice presidents ($M = 1.80$), deans ($M = 1.71$), assistant/associate deans ($M = 2.09$), directors, system/program analyst ($M = 1.75$), and other clerical staff ($M = 2.00$) agreed with most. Vice presidents ($s^2 = 1.539$), directors ($s^2 = 1.376$), systems/program analyst ($s^2 = 1.320$), counselors/advisors/coordinator ($s^2 = 1.251$), other professionals ($s^2 = 1.230$) and receptionist/clerks/processors ($s^2 = 1.290$), had the most disagreement amongst themselves about the need for certification as the method to ensure all financial aid practitioners have a certain skill set and a certain level of expertise. Presidents ($s^2 = 1.718$), supervisors/managers ($s^2 = 1.319$), and other stakeholders ($s^2 = 1.337$) disagreed amongst themselves most about the need to set administrative capability standards

beyond what is currently in the Title IV financial aid regulations. The remaining groups disagreed with themselves most about the need to ensure financial aid practitioners pledge to uphold and keep the NASFAA statement of professional ethics.

Benefits of Certification

Survey participants were asked if certification would increase the stature of and respect for financial aid practitioners. Overall, 82% of the NASFAA members who responded to the survey either agreed (56.5%) or somewhat agreed (25.5%) that certification would increase the stature and respect of practitioners. Approximately 12% disagreed (4.8%) or somewhat disagreed (7.5%), while 6% indicated they had no opinion on the matter. The mean of the responses for this question was 1.79 and the standard deviation was 1.112. This statement ranked third on level of agreement for questions in this section of the survey.

Descriptive statistics based on job title using the Likert scale in section two of the survey appear in Table 13. Note that the responses for the aggregate mean for the President/owner group is normally distributed ($M = 1.71$; $skewness = .595$; $kurtosis = -.350$). The years of experience in financial aid administration ranged from 24 to 30 years for this group; whereas, the range for all other groups in this category was approximately 1 to 30 years of experience. This group agreed with each other most, and the group mean is in close proximity of the overall mean of 1.79 computed for all survey respondents. The Other industry professionals group, which represents other stakeholders in the financial aid industry (e.g. loan servicers, software vendors, lawyers, auditors, etc.), agreed with this statement most ($M = 1.44$; $s = .860$; $s^2 = .740$), while the Assistant/associate dean group disagreed with this statement and each other most

Table 13

Descriptive Statistics: Benefits of Certification by Job Title – Likert Scale

<i>Job Title</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>s</i>	<i>s²</i>	<i>Skewness</i>	<i>Kurtosis</i>
President/owner /CEO/CFO	7	.3%	1.71	.756	.571	.595	-.350
Vice president/assistant VP	85	3.1%	1.89	1.254	1.572	1.281	.407
Dean	24	.9%	1.71	1.083	1.172	1.764	2.899
Assistant/associate dean	45	1.6%	2.27	1.421	2.018	.797	-.764
Director	955	34.7%	1.91	1.221	1.491	1.269	.464
Assistant/associate director	639	23.2%	1.78	1.128	1.273	1.520	1.375
Managers/supervisor	82	3.0%	1.57	.930	.865	1.999	4.041
Systems analyst/operator/tech	36	1.3%	1.81	1.191	1.418	1.258	.338
Counselor/advisor/coordinator	591	21.4%	1.68	1.077	1.159	1.727	2.182
Other professional	60	2.2%	1.72	.976	.952	1.738	3.172
Receptionist/clerk/processor	22	.8%	1.77	1.110	1.232	1.644	2.451
Other clerical	14	.5%	1.77	1.110	1.232	1.644	2.451
Other industry professionals	196	7.1%	1.44	.860	.740	2.390	5.851
Total	2,756	100.0%	1.79	1.142	1.304	1.493	1.245

($M = 2.27$; $s = 1.421$; $s^2 = 2.018$).

Level of Support for Certification

Survey participants were asked to respond to eight questions about the extent to which they would support a certification process by indicating Agree = 1; Somewhat Agree = 2; No Opinion = 3; Somewhat Disagree = 4; or Disagree = 5. The overall results revealed 67% either agreed (39.2%), or somewhat agreed (27.2%) they would support a process established to ensure all financial aid practitioners meet a basic core set of standards. Supporting a voluntary credentialing process ($M = 1.95$), participating in the process itself ($M = 1.85$), and encouraging others to participate in a voluntary credentialing process ($M = 1.82$) were the three statements that respondents agreed with

most. Respondents disagreed most with the statement about supporting a mandatory internship requirement ($M = 3.02$). In addition, $M = 2.80$ for the following statement: “*I would pursue a degree in financial aid administration if a program were available.*” The standard deviation of 1.486 and variance of 2.209 indicates a lack of agreement between respondents on this statement. When this statement was examined based on job title, respondents with the job title of assistant/associate director up to president/owner/CEO/CFO disagreed with the statement most ($M = 3.24$). Whereas, respondents in the positions of other clerical up to and including Managers/supervisors disagreed most ($M = 2.80$) with the statement “*I am in favor of a mandatory internship in a financial aid office for entry-level professionals.*” Pursuing a degree in financial aid administration is the statement for which there was the most disagreement across job titles ($s^2 = 1.486$).

Except for respondents in the position of president/owner/CEO/CFO, participating in a voluntary certification process ($M = 1.88$) and encouraging others to participate too ($M = 1.82$) were the two statements that respondents agreed with most across job titles. The President/owner/CEO/CFO group was most in favor of establishing a recognized curriculum in financial aid administration ($M = 1.86$) and mandatory basic training ($M = 2.00$). There were no other notable differences in group means based on the demographic variables.

Certification Process

Survey participants were asked to respond to a series of questions targeted at defining a certification process for financial aid practitioners. Five questions related to the implementation and structure of a certification process were listed in section 2 of the

survey using a 5-point Likert scale. The valid responses were Agree = 1; Somewhat Agree = 2; No Opinion = 3; Somewhat Disagree = 4; or Disagree = 5. Figure 2 provides a summary of the responses.

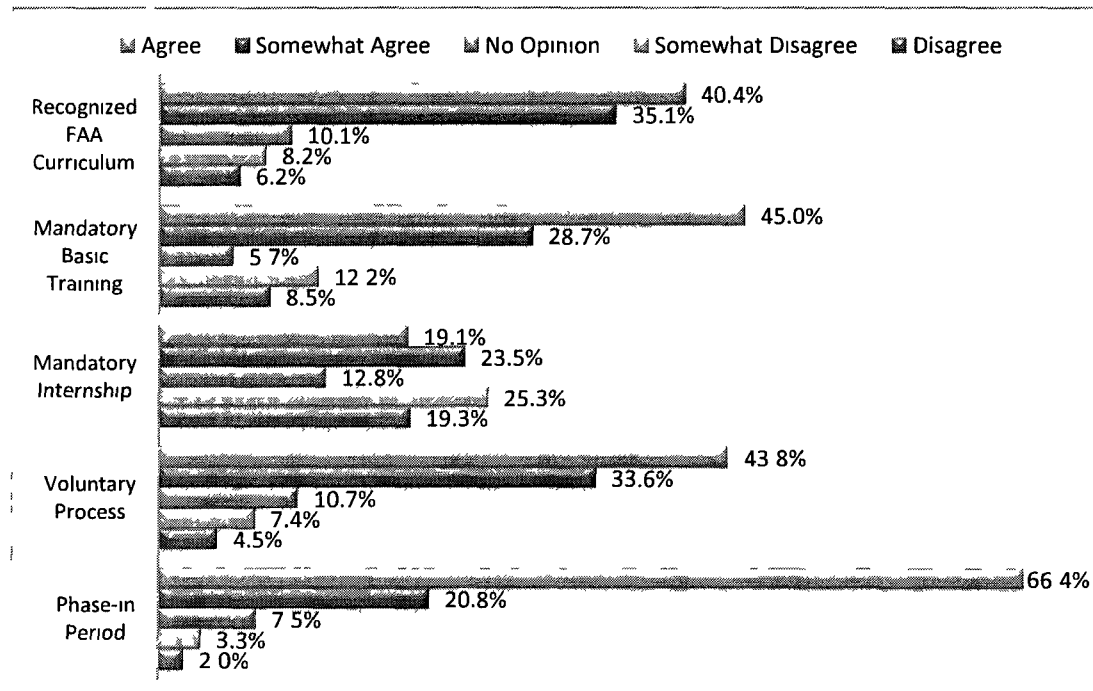


Figure 2. Suggested certification process components.

When asked if a recognized curriculum in financial aid administration should be established, the mean response was 2.05. More than 76% of the respondents agreed (40.4%) or somewhat agreed (35.1%) with this statement. Approximately 14% somewhat disagreed (8.2%) or disagreed (6.2%), while 10% indicated they had no opinion on the matter. Similarly, $M = 2.11$ for the question that asked if respondents were in favor of a mandatory basic training requirement. The number of respondents who agreed (45.0%) or somewhat agreed (28.7%) with this statement totaled 73.7%. Approximately, 20.7% of the respondents disagreed (8.5%) or somewhat disagreed

(12.2%), while 5.7% had no opinion. When the Likert scale questions were reviewed by job title, the responses were consistent with the responses received to the level of support questions discussed previously, with one exception. Respondents with the job title of Vice president/assistant vice president, Associate/assistant dean, and Systems/program analyst disagreed most with the statement about the need for a mandatory basic training requirement. The corresponding standard deviations were ($s = 1.567$), ($s = 1.514$), and ($s = 1.171$) respectively.

As mentioned previously, respondents as a whole were of two minds about whether or not they would support a mandatory internship requirement. Over 42% either agreed (19.1%) or somewhat agreed (23.5%) that there should be a mandatory internship requirement for entry level practitioners. Approximately 13% had no opinion on the matter, while 45% disagreed (19.3%) or somewhat disagreed (25.3%).

More than 77% of those who responded indicated they were in favor of a voluntary certification process, while 12% indicated that were not in favor, and 11% indicated no opinion. Over 87% indicated that any process adopted should include a phase-in period for current practitioners. Note that this is the statement that respondents agreed with most ($M = 1.54$; $s = .914$; $s^2 = .835$).

The next section of the survey asked participants to select the components that would comprise the ideal certification process. In answering these questions, respondents were told to assume the majority of NASFAA members favored the establishment of a common set of core standards or levels of standards that all financial aid practitioners must meet. The responses are listed in rank order in Figure 3.

Although respondents appeared torn between voluntary (42.5%) and mandatory (39.6%) entry-level training, they indicated a preference for different levels of certification (59.9%), voluntary advanced training and professional development (58.1%), voluntary continuing education units (CEUs, 49.3%), and voluntary continuing education units (CEUs, 49.3%).

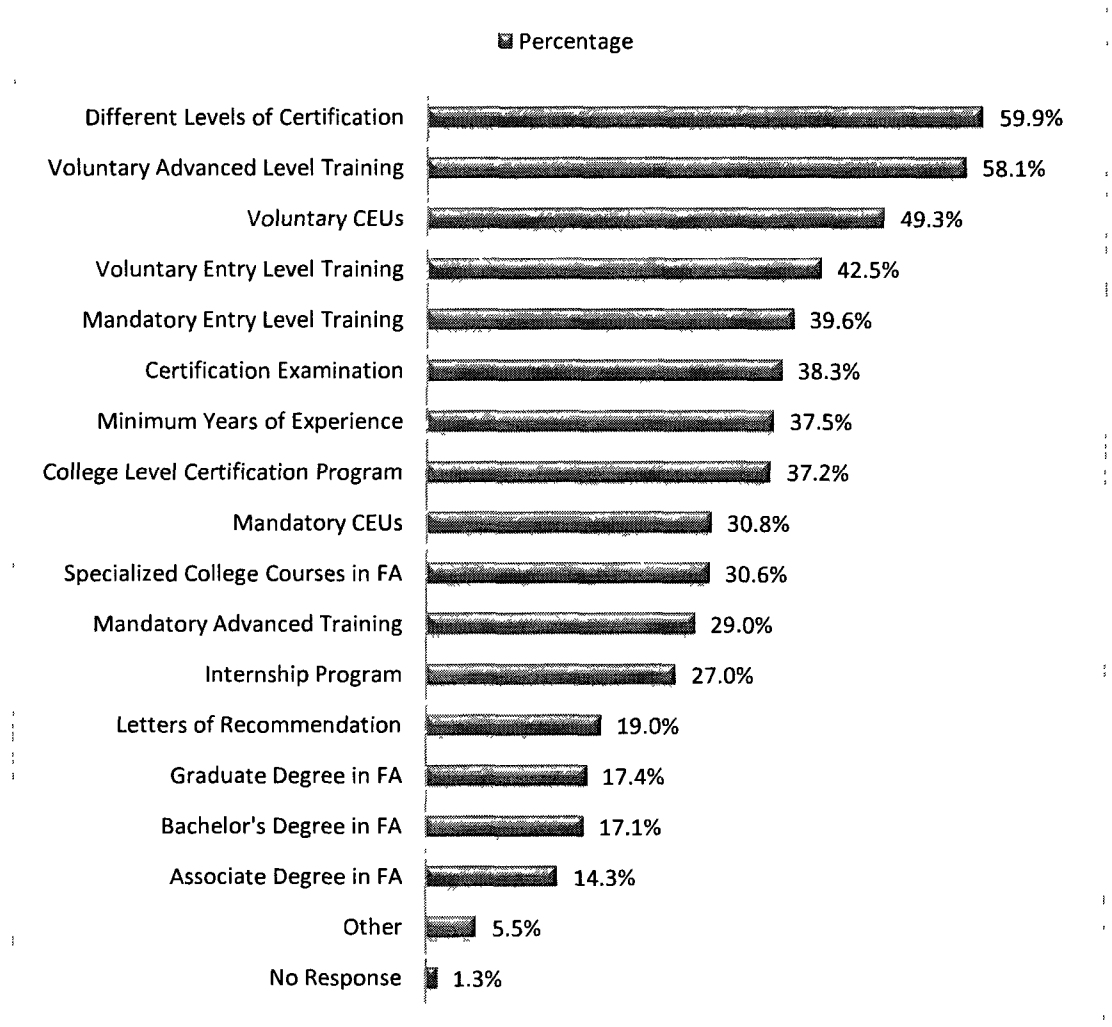


Figure 3. Components of the certification process by rank. *Note:* The number of responses does not total 2,756 and the total percent of responses does not equal 100% because respondents were allowed to select more than one answer or no response at all to this survey question.

Participants were then asked how many levels of standards they favored. The responses are listed in rank order in Figure 4. The levels that were identified most frequently by the majority of survey respondents were an entry level (67.3%), an advanced level for managers (56.7%), program specific specializations (51.3%), and an intermediate level (50.0%).

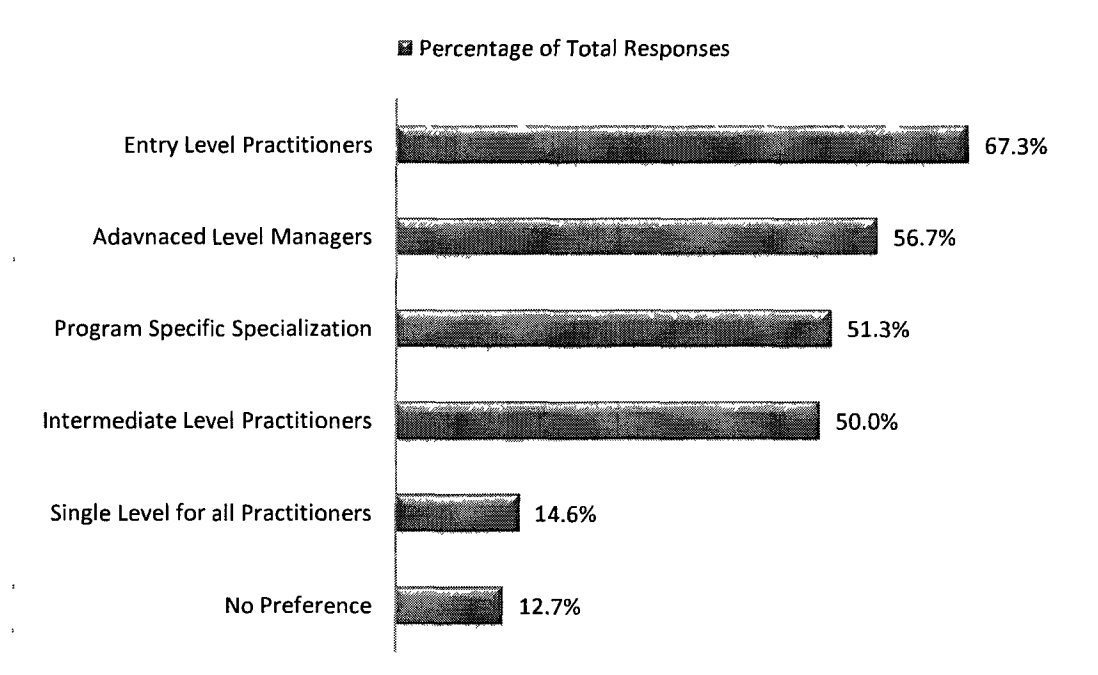


Figure 4. Levels of recognition in rank order. The percent of responses does not equal 100% because respondents were allowed to select more than one answer or no answer at all to this survey question.

The final question in the level of support section of the survey asked respondents to indicate the duration of the professional recognition credential. In other words, should the financial aid practitioner's certification status be permanent, renewable, or something other status after the credential is earned? The results are summarized in Figure 5. Note that 40.97% of the respondents selected permanent, 51.5% selected renewable, 5.8%

selected other, and 1.7% did not respond to this question. This is consistent with the responses received to similar questions on the survey.

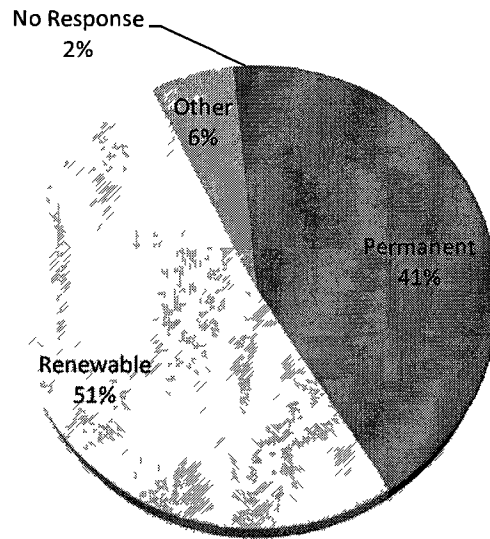


Figure 5. Duration of certification. The number of responses does not total 2,756 and the percent of responses does not equal 100% because respondents were allowed to select more than one answer to this survey question.

Survey Comments

Survey respondents were asked to provide comments and suggestions about additional features that should be included as part of a certification process, comments about certification in general, and an explanation of why they are not in favor of a certification process, if applicable. A data diary and codebook were used along with the open-coding method to assist with the data analysis of the responses to these open-ended survey questions to help facilitate objectivity (Creswell, 2003, 2007).

A cursory review of the comments was performed to identify themes. A definition was developed for each theme and a code was assigned to it. Next, each

response was read and coded to reflect all of the applicable themes. After all of the comments were coded, the researcher counted each time a code appeared to get a total for each them and a grand total for all themes. The seventeen themes that emerged and the corresponding definitions, response frequencies, and response percentages appear in Table 14. Figure 6 contains response frequencies only.

Approximately 25% of the respondents who provided comments viewed certification as a barrier to future financial aid practitioners. They expressed concerns about the number of financial aid practitioners that will be retiring over the next several years and the need to develop strategies to attract individuals to the field as opposed to implementing a process that may create a barrier for potential practitioners. These comments were consistent with one of the two themes that tied for the second highest frequency of comments. Around 9.8% of the respondents indicated they would not support a certification process because it is not needed. They stated that the laws, regulations, and sub-regulatory guidance governing Title IV financial aid programs, and existing human resources hiring requirements and practices are sufficient to ensure that financial aid practitioners meet the required standards and desired qualifications of their employers. On the contrary, 9.8% of the respondents viewed certification as a way to educate stakeholders and promote the financial aid industry in a positive manner that would attract individuals to the industry.

Several commenters (9.2%) emphasized the need for a voluntary process to avoid creating a barrier for current practitioners. Although based on anecdotal evidence, 3.1% of the comments were reminders that most financial aid practitioners enter the profession by accident, not by choice. This is consistent with the responses supporting a voluntary

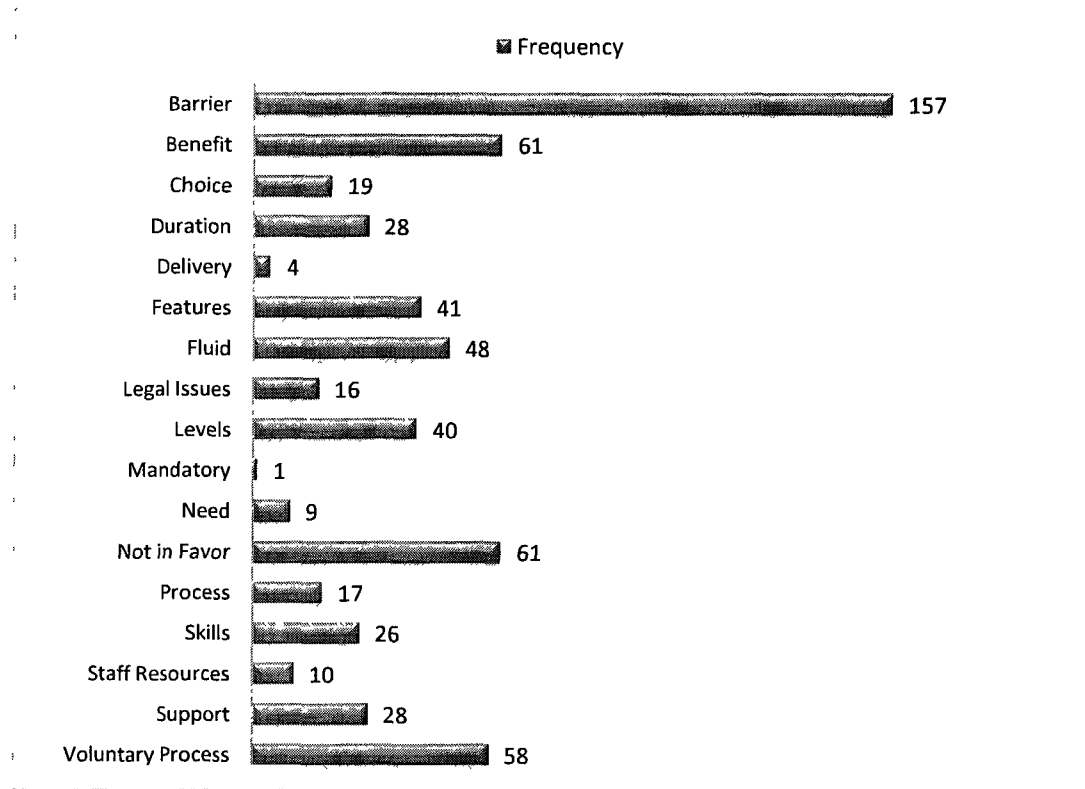


Figure 6. Frequency of comments received by category.

process discussed in both the *Level of Support for Certification* and *Certification Process* sections of this study.

Approximately 7.7% of the commenters stated financial aid administration is very fluid. They indicated that the ever-changing laws, regulations, and other requirements with which financial aid practitioners must comply make implementing a certification process impracticable. For this reason, many commenters (29.6%) reiterated their responses discussed in the *Level of Support for Certification* and *Certification Process* sections of this study about the features of the certification process. In addition, there was an emphasis on the need to consider specialized tracks, the method of delivery, the

duration of the credential, and grandfathering of the existing practitioners based on existing knowledge and skills in order to garner support for a certification process.

The issue of potential legal liabilities discussed in the literature review for this study continues to be a concern for 2.6% of the commenters. They were concerned with the possibility of lawsuits due to the denial or revocation of a practitioner's certification status and the tax implications for NASFAA as a nonprofit association, while 4.2% of the commenters expressed concerns specifically about NASFAA's ability to provide the staff resources needed to implement and maintain a certification process. On the other hand, 1.6% of the commenters reiterated the need for a certification process as a necessary condition or requirement to sustain the profession. One commenter stated that certification should be a requisite to practicing financial aid.

Additional Features

Approximately 17% (464 out of 2,756) of the survey participants submitted comments to the question, "*What additional features should be included as part of a professional recognition process?*" Many of the comments received reiterated the features identified when responding to the question about the ideal process. In addition, commenters stated that any certification process adopted would need to be endorsed by college and university presidents to be successful. An official notification sent to the Chief Executive Officer or president of the institution when the credential is earned is also desired. Respondents also cautioned that any process adopted should not be cost-prohibitive.

Table 14

Theme Descriptions and Frequencies

Description	Frequency	Percent
<i>Barrier:</i> A certification process will be a barrier to those who wish to enter the financial aid professional.	157	25.0%
<i>Benefit:</i> Promotes or has a positive impact on the financial aid profession in a useful manner.	61	9.8%
<i>Choice:</i> Based on anecdotal evidence, most financial aid professionals enter the profession by accident – not by choice.	19	3.1%
<i>Duration:</i> The length of time it would take to get a certification credential and/or length of time the credential would be valid.	28	4.5%
<i>Delivery:</i> The method used to collect information and/or administer any applicable measures required for certification.	4	0.7%
<i>Features:</i> A desired option or requirement for an individual to receive a financial aid certification credential.	41	6.6%
<i>Fluid:</i> The ever-changing nature of the laws, regulations, and other requirements with which financial aid professional must comply.	48	7.7%
<i>Legal:</i> Liability issues for NASFAA prevent the association from offering a certification process.	16	2.6%
<i>Levels:</i> The various types of certification credentials offered as compared to the complex and diverse individual needs of schools.	40	6.4%
<i>Mandatory:</i> A requisite standard or requirement, or process.	1	0.2%
<i>Need:</i> A necessary condition or requirement to sustain the profession.	9	1.4%
<i>Not in favor:</i> Profession does not need and/or I do not support a certification process.	61	9.8%
<i>Process:</i> The method by which a financial aid professional obtains certification.	17	2.7%
<i>Skills:</i> The knowledge and ability needed to execute a task successfully.	26	4.2%
<i>Staff resources:</i> The personnel needed to implement and maintain a task, process, or operation.	10	1.6%
<i>Support:</i> To uphold, sustain, and defend a financial aid certification process.	28	4.5%
<i>Voluntary:</i> An optional standard or requirement, or process.	58	9.2%
Totals	624	100.0%

Some additional features suggested included: (a) peer recommendations; (b) minimum salary and staffing benchmarks and/or requirements; (c) self-paced online/distance education courses; (d) tiered boot camps; (e) supervisory and ethics training; (f) periodic testing on financial aid concepts; (g) testing on customer service and managerial skills; (h) credential renewal in five-year increments; (i) credit for years of service and volunteer activities; and (j) a mentoring component.

Not in Favor of Certification: Detriments

Approximately 13% (365 of 2,756) of the survey respondents submitted 624 distinct responses to the request, “*If you are not in favor of a professional recognition process, please explain why.*” Many of those who responded to this item were not actually opposed to a financial aid credentialing process. In fact, 242 of the commenters explicitly indicated they were not in favor of certification; 79 stated they would support the process; and 44 were undecided. This means 9% of the commenters who responded to this question (242 of 2,756) were actually opposed to a certification process for financial aid practitioners. The following is a compilation and synthesis of comments provided in the “*Not in Favor of Certification*” category.

Commenters not in favor of a certification process did not think certification is needed in general, but believed the profession would benefit from a process that consists of some organization and more standardization of existing training and professional development activities. Based on the responses to both the closed-ended and opened ended questions, a few of the respondents indicated that entry-level training should be mandatory and that anything beyond entry-level training, such as intermediate or advanced level training; professional development activities; or credentialing should be

voluntary. Commenters stated that the variety of degrees held by current practitioners add diversity to the profession that may be lost if a certificate or degree program were offered in financial aid administration. In addition, transferability of a certificate or degree in financial aid administration was concern.

The need for support from upper administration on campus, and cost were other factors that were mentioned. Respondents cautioned that any process adopted that accessed additional cost over and above current membership and service fees would be a burden that institutions may be unwilling and/or unable to absorb. Some commenters suggested the cost should be absorbed into the current dues structure. Some not in favor of a certification process directly stated credentialing is just another way for NASFAA to make money. Others expressed concerns about designating an authoritative credentialing body. Some assumed it would be NASFAA, while others indicated any credentialing process adopted should be regulated and/or administered by the U.S. Department of Education. In addition, respondents questioned whether a credentialing process would be restricted to certification to administer Title IV programs only.

Other separate but related issues that surfaced were continued frustration with perceived inadequate salaries and staffing resources needed to achieve the mission, goals, and objectives of the institution. The word “perceived” is used because at the time this study was conducted, there was no data available to assess whether those who referred to inadequate salaries and staffing resources had utilized a Standards of Excellence Human Resources and Facilities Review, the NASFAA Staffing and Salary Analysis Tools, or other methods to ascertain the adequacy of salaries and/or staffing levels on their respective campuses.

There is one additional topic that deserves attention – ethics. Some commenters stated that financial aid practitioners are already ethical professionals. They feel movement towards credentialing is the result of the financial aid community overreacting to the student loan crisis involving conflict of interest and illegal inducements in August 2003. These commenters expressed a belief that the issue of accountability is adequately addressed by current Title IV reporting and audits requirements, and program reviews; therefore, credentialing would be punishing many for the misdeeds of a few. The bottom line for those not in favor of a certification process was it is simply not necessary.

Additional Suggestions

Survey participants provided 543 additional comments and suggestions. The majority of these duplicated responses and comments expressed in other sections of this study. For example, several commenters indicated that a certification process was long overdue and necessary to correct public misconceptions, while others restated they are not in favor of such a process. In addition, similar to feedback received to the 2010 NASFAA Institutional Membership Survey, some commenters suggested that NASFAA focus on reducing the burden of aid administration first, and then focus on certification.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

The certification of financial aid administrators is a topic that has been discussed and debated since the inception of NASFAA in 1966 (Brooks, 1986). Each time the topic has been raised, leaders in the industry have concluded that certification was not feasible and/or not needed (NASFAA, 1974, 1988, 2009; Simmons, 1971). For example, in 1974, NASFAA formed a committee that drafted a framework for certification. The framework was discussed and debated for several years, and then tabled in 1978 when the decision was made not to take a formal position on the matter.

Attempts to implement certification on the state level have also been made, but these efforts were discontinued not because the idea lacked merit, but because of potential liability issues, the lack of support from the financial aid community as a whole, and the 1978 decision of the national association not to take a formal position on the matter (NASFAA, 1988). Since that time, the topic of certification has been formally raised twice on the national level, once in 1988 and again in 2009. However, no formal decisions had been made at the time this study was conducted.

Using Caplow's (1954) and Wilensky's (1964) theories on professionalization as a basis, a new theory of professionalization was developed for this study. The new higher education theory of professionalization revealed that certification, or a comparable mechanism for setting a base-line core set of standards that all practicing financial aid administrators must meet, is the next and final step that must be taken in order for the current financial aid occupation to become a full fledged profession. Overall, 70% of the survey respondents agreed (41.3%) or somewhat agreed (28.5%) with this sentiment.

Approximately 19% somewhat agreed (11.0%) or disagreed (8.0%), and 11.2% had no opinion on the matter. What the process would look like varied based on the job title of the respondents.

Approximately, 69% of the respondents either agreed (37.9%) or somewhat agreed (31.0%) that there is a need for some sort of certification process, while approximately, 20% disagreed (7.1%) or somewhat disagreed (13.0%), and 11% indicated they had no opinion on the matter. Protecting the public interest, ensuring accountability of financial aid practitioners as fiduciaries, and self-regulating to ensure administrative capability were the top three statements that survey respondents agreed with most regarding the need for some sort of process.

Approximately 82% of the NASFAA members who responded to the survey either agreed (56.5%) or somewhat agreed (25.5%) that certification would increase the stature and respect of practitioners. Approximately 12% disagreed (4.8%) or somewhat disagreed (7.5%), while 6% indicated they had no opinion on the matter. Other industry stakeholders tended to agree with this sentiment more so than financial aid practitioners.

The overall results revealed 67% either agreed (39.2%), or somewhat agreed (27.2%) they would support a process established to ensure all financial aid practitioners meet a basic core set of standards. Supporting a voluntary credentialing process, participating in the process itself, and encouraging others to participate in a voluntary credentialing process were the three statements that respondents agreed with most. Supporting a mandatory internship requirement for entry-level practitioners is the statement that survey respondents disagreed with most, especially those in the position of other clerical staff up to and including managers and supervisors.

More than 77% of those who responded to the survey were in favor of a voluntary certification process, while 12% indicated that they were not in favor, and 11% indicated they had no opinion on the matter. While there was no consensus on what the process should look like, the survey results indicated that respondents perceived the ideal process would be voluntary and renewable, with four distinct levels of certification (basic/entry, intermediate, advanced/manager, and program specialization). It would contain a continuing education requirement, and include a grandfathering or exemption clause for current practitioners that allow education and experience to count toward fulfilling certification requirements.

Approximately 9% of the survey respondents explicitly indicated that they were not in favor of a certification process, and approximately 2% were undecided. The overall sentiment of those not in favor was that certification is not needed; however, they believed that the financial aid industry would benefit from standardization of existing training and professional development activities.

Conclusions

Both the higher education theory of professionalization developed for this study and the survey results suggest the need for the establishment of a base-line core set of standards that all practicing financial aid administrators must meet and a mechanism for enforcing the requirements. Perhaps the next step is to conduct a needs assessment to ask questions, compare answers, and make an informed decision about the next step to take based on feedback from a larger pool of the financial aid community. In the meantime, there are several components already in place that may be used to address this need if modified and/or formalized. A good place to start might be for financial aid

administrators to consider formally adopting the CAS recommendation that professional financial aid staff hold an earned graduate degree in a field relevant to the position they hold, or possess an appropriate combination of education credentials and related work experience as initially developed by Crissman and Martin in 2006. Another option might be to expand the current administrative capability requirements under the Title IV regulations for designating a capable individual for administering Title IV programs to include the caveat that the chief financial aid administrator must have a combination of a certain level of education, financial aid specific training, and experience. Adopting a mandatory entry-level training requirement such as Department of Education basic training, regional or state association boot camps, or the equivalent on the national or state level for which participants could earn a certificate of completion and/or continuing education units is another option that warrants consideration. These are all steps that may be taken as a prelude to implementing a formal certification process.

Recommendations for Future Research

Several topics surfaced during the literature review and data analysis that warrant further research. The new higher education theory of professionalization used as the theoretical framework for this study contains two steps that may be unique to higher education associations. They are establishing a mechanism for advocacy and implementing a compliance review process. Additional research is needed to validate or refute this hypothesis.

Peterson (2008a) identified nine factors that influence college and university administrators' perceptions of financial aid administrators as a part of a pilot study to

identify the implications of these factors for the allocation of resources to the financial aid office. An actual study is needed to confirm or refute these preliminary findings.

Fertig (2009) found that among human resources professionals, the certification rate was five times higher for human resource association members than for non-members. He suggested association membership might be a motivating factor to seeking certification. In addition, Grogan (1990) suggested there might be some positive correlation between certification status and the willingness of members of a profession to participate in professional development activities. Both these areas warrant further research.

Financial aid administrators operate under a set of administrative capability requirements specified in Title IV of the U.S. Code of Federal Regulations. Approximately 45.1% (1,244) of the survey respondents do not see a need for additional administrative capability standards, while 37.9% (1045) think that there is a need. The remaining 16.9% (467) of the respondents did not have an opinion one way or the other. At the time this study was conducted, there was a congressionally mandated advisory committee charged with analyzing duplicative, inconsistent, burdensome, and unnecessary regulations. A study of financial aid administrators' perception of the adequacy of the current administrative capability regulations and the implications for certification is a topic that warrants additional research if the advisory committee does not address it.

The existing research related to training curricula for financial aid administrators is out dated. Schiesz (1974) recommended that financial aid administrators become more actively involved in financial aid research related to training and professional

development. In light of the impact of technological changes on the administration of Title IV programs, research is needed to validate the existing training methods or develop new ones. In addition, if a certification process is adopted, additional research must be conducted to identify and compare existing resources that may serve as a framework for that process, including training models.

The existing research on a formal degree program for financial aid administrators is also outdated. In order for a formal degree program in financial aid administration to be pursued as a credentialing option, research must be conducted to update the existing curriculum model or develop a new one. Additional research may also help identify current certificate and degree programs that can be recommended to those interested in financial aid administration.

Staffing inadequacies and salary inequities are other areas where additional research is needed. Perceived staffing inadequacies and salary inequities were a recurring theme throughout the open-ended comments from the survey data used for this study. Additional research is needed to either validate or refute these concerns, and develop strategies to correct these problems, if needed.

There continues to be a void in the literature on training and professional development of financial aid administrators. This void was initially identified by Schiesz (1974). Studies have been conducted since that time by Fenske and Bowman (1981), and Simmons (1985); however, there is an absence of current research in this area. Additional studies in this area are needed.

In conclusion, there are research arms that have conducted studies on access, choice, and persistence as they relate to the amount of financial assistance students

receive. There have also been studies on enrollment management strategies and methodologies for distributing state level aid. However, based on a review of the literature, and the training and experience of the researcher, there is a need for peer reviewed research on some of the operational aspects of financial aid administration that can be used to form a list of data-driven best practices (Blink, 2007). Some possible topics include but are not limited to: (a) packaging models; (b) the affects of recalculation policies on retention and completion rates; (c) the impact of staff training and professional development on student satisfaction; (d) the costs versus benefits of implementing certain financial aid application processing policies and procedures such as workflow, document scanning, electronic loan counseling, and one-stop entry and enrollment processing; and (e) a comparison of the efficiency and effectiveness of certain organizational structures in the financial aid office, and the implications for services for certain student demographics. These studies would help build a more comprehensive body of peer reviewed financial aid research that can be used as a basis for establishing a research-based list of best practices.

Potential Implications

The findings from this study have implications for financial aid practitioners, and college and university administrators. The findings refute decades of anecdotal evidence indicating the majority of financial aid practitioners do not see a need for or support a certification process (Brooks, 1986; Fertig, 2009; NASFAA, 1988, 2009). This study fills a void in the literature on the topic of certification of financial aid practitioners. Lastly, it provides recommendations for future research on training, professional development, and credentialing of financial aid practitioners.

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APPENDIX A

Theories of Professionalization

Steps	Caplow's Theory	Wilensky's Theory	Higher Education Theory
1. Establishment of a full-time task (1966)		✓	✓
2. Establishment of a professional association with membership requirements (1966)	✓	✓	✓
3. Establishment of a mechanism for advocacy on the local, state, regional, and national levels (1966)			✓
4. Stratification of positions and job duties (i.e. administrator, managers, supervisors, coordinators, technicians, and support staff) (1968)		✓	✓
5. Change in association name or establishment of a new name (1969)	✓		✓
6. Period of prolonged political agitation to obtain public power and support (1971)	✓	✓	✓

7. Development of training programs and facilities controlled directly or indirectly by occupation (1979)	✓		✓
8. Competition between new occupation and neighboring occupations (e.g. FAAs, consultants, servicers, ED) (1979)		✓	✓
9. Establishment of a process for on-going review and sanctioning office operations (1999)			✓
10. Development and promulgation of a code of ethics (1999/2007)	✓	✓	✓
11. Establishment of a formal academic training program (1968)		✓	✓
12. Establishment of a core set of standards that all practitioners must meet	✓		✓

APPENDIX B

Delaney, Jr., F.H., Hylander, G.L., Karp, R., & Lange, R.J. (1974). A taxonomy of objectives for the training of financial aid administrators. *The Journal of Student Financial Aid*, 4(3), 5-12.

Curriculum Model for a Master's Degree in Financial Aid Administration

Background

After determining that there was a curriculum void in the training and the degree offerings for financial aid administrators in university schools of education, a study group, which was a segment of a Seminar in Curriculum of Higher Education at Boston College, set out to develop a curriculum model for a Master's degree in Financial Aid Administration. The study group labored under the direction of Dr. Michael Anello, Chairman of the Department of Higher Education. This taxonomy is abstracted from that larger project. The general objectives of the curriculum model are accomplished through the more specific objectives included in this taxonomy. Both cognitive and affective objectives are included, and they are stated behaviorally; since it is both attitude and action which we hope to develop. The general objectives for the training of financial aid administrators are to establish proficiency in the following skills:

1. Counsel students and their families about expenses, aid sources, financing of post-secondary education.
2. Administer the variety of aid programs Federal, State, local and institutional.
3. Seek new sources of aid for the families and institutions who use the financial aid officer's talents.
4. Understand with professional insight the economics and sociology of post-secondary educational programs.
5. Achieve the stated goals of the institution, the nation and the individuals concerned by effectively facilitating the programs of each.
6. Advise the institutional leaders, government and families of new needs and directions for enhancement of human development through financial support of educational programs and individuals.
7. Research new and more effective models for student aid administration.

In attempting to define the areas of inquiry and training for the financial aid administrator, difficulty was encountered in limiting the range of topics and possible courses to those which could be universally applied to all financial aid programs. The goal then was both universality in the application to the professional over wide range of personal or institutional program needs and manageability within an educational or training program. There was no attempt to overlap with the specific computational goals defined in the workshops which are conducted by the various needs analysis systems, but competence in computation techniques was assumed while objectives for the broader attitudinal

areas were developed. Three major classifications of areas of study were identified: Social Sciences, Administrative and Organizational Studies, and Behavioral Sciences. Listed within each major area of study are a number of suggested courses or topical areas of concern which should be treated either as individual courses or as sections of courses in the degree or training programs.

I. SOCIAL SCIENCES

A. Sociology of Education/History and Philosophy of American Education.

1. Trace the historical and societal evolution of public and private education.
2. Understand the need for an individual to be exposed to the opportunity of some form of post-secondary education in order to better understand and contribute to society.
3. Outline the various post-secondary educational alternatives presently available.
4. Evaluate education as it presently meets the demands of a nuclear society.
5. Identify individual educational needs and the programs and experiences best designed to fulfill them.
6. Evaluate the benefits of life experiences and the integrity of mid life career changes.
7. Explain the role of the family as the primary source of informal schooling and attitudinal transmission.
8. Identify the attitudes of minority groups and social classes toward education.
9. Identify the factors that facilitate accessibility to education among social groups.
10. Identify the significant educational reformers and their ideas and compare their impact upon society.
11. II. Compare and contrast state and federal statutes as they apply to educational policy.
12. Catalog the factors that allow education to function as an agent of social mobility.
13. Determine if the role of educational institutions is to mirror public opinion or rather to shape and direct it.
14. Identify the influences that a community may exert upon educational philosophy and programs.
15. Describe the social, cultural and intellectual impact of organized education as a change-agent upon the community.

B. Social Inequity/Minority Group Sociology/Discrimination.

1. Learn origins and historical development of philosophical concepts of equality.
2. Critically examine major theories of the origins, causes and functions of social inequality.

3. Examine and relate historical trends in distribution of income, wealth and power to concepts of equality and social inequality.
4. Understand varying roles and positions in American society of minority groups and explain why they are at times subject to discriminatory treatment.
5. Specify psychological effects of poverty and discrimination as experienced by different minorities studied.
6. Evaluate the effect on society as a whole of discrimination against any group.
7. Examine court decisions relative to discrimination; describe how they have been implemented; evaluate their effects.
8. Critically examine the theoretical reasons given for discrimination; list and explain the effects of discrimination on individuals and groups.
9. Identify personal and societal problems caused by poverty.
10. Identify personal and societal problems caused by discrimination.
11. Critically review scholarly literature on social stratification and inequality.
12. Compare and evaluate suggested means for dealing with social inequality from different political and ideological perspectives.
13. Examine ways in which race and poverty lead to discrimination in the access to post-secondary education.
14. Examine ways in which discrimination in the access to post-secondary education affects the performance of those subject to discrimination.
15. Identify areas where change of a remedial nature could and should be made to insure equality of access to post-secondary education; evaluate the feasibility of making such changes.
16. Support recommendations for change by documentary (theoretical) and actual evidence of the effectiveness of recommended changes.
17. Establish an order of priority for recommended changes and actions, taking into account their feasibility.

C. Education and Political Process/The Law and Post-Secondary Education/Current Problems in Education.

1. Explain the dynamic and structural aspects of national government as it relates to governmental involvement with education in general and the support of post-secondary education in particular.
2. Describe the influence of the President, Congress, political parties, interest groups (lobbies), the administrative bureaucracy and public opinion on the development of legislative programs and public support of post-secondary education.
3. Critically examine the general structure of education in the United States at the national, state and municipal levels, and private and public levels.
4. Evaluate ways in which the variety of influences mentioned above affect the allocation of resources for education at various levels.
5. Relate basic laws affecting the structure of and allocation of educational resources to educational institutions and students.

6. Examine the effects of landmark court decisions on American post-secondary education.
7. Identify the critical issues of post-secondary education in the early 1970's.
8. Project and predict critical issues of post-secondary education from 1975 on.
9. Identify areas where change in the systems of post-secondary education should be made. Suggest ways in which to make these changes, and evaluate their feasibility.
10. Suggest ways of meeting the critical issues of post-secondary education and evaluate the feasibility and effects of the suggestions.

D. The Family/Economics of the Family/Counseling the Family for Education.

1. Appreciate the role of the family as the first level of informal schooling and transmitter of values and cultural heritage.
2. Gain an awareness of the impact of societal mores and rapidity of change upon the family unit.
3. Develop an understanding of the family's role and position as an integral institution within the general context of contemporary society.
4. Isolate and identify those factors which both contribute to and detract from a healthy family environment.
5. Appreciate the personal, emotional and physiological needs that must be provided for within the family unit.
6. Detail and determine economic requirements and fiscal priorities of families from various social stratas.
7. List the factors that differentiate the social composition and needs of families from rural, urban and suburban environments.
8. Compare the structure of minority group families and examine ethnic attitudes towards success, education, society and class values.
9. Apply the skills of counseling techniques in resolving family conflict, social adjustment and periods of stress.
10. Discuss the advantages of the variety of sources listing the options and alternatives of the programs and the value to families which might use these different programs.
11. Discuss the impact of family goals, Federal goals and funding levels and family income on students' aspirations to the variety of post-secondary educational programs.
12. Write financing plans for a low, a middle and a higher income family where a student of that family is attending a 2-year, a 4-year or a vocational post-secondary school. Utilize all of the possible sources open to the model family in each category.

II. ADMINISTRATIVE AND ORGANIZATIONAL STUDIES

- A. Organization of the University/Administration of Post-Secondary Aid Programs/Financial Aid Administration Management and Methods/Financing of Education.

1. Illustrate the structure of a college showing the main divisions, departments and offices and their relationship to each other department in the structure.
2. Write a brief description for each administrative department demonstrating its functional relationship with the student aid office.
3. Develop, after visiting several functioning aid offices, a model for a management information system for a financial aid office.
4. Write manuals for each phase of operations in the financial aid office.
5. Write job descriptions for each assistant or clerk who has an assignment to a particular operation in the office.
6. Organize in-service training for all those in the institution who participate in the administration of the financial aid programs.
7. Supervise the office functions, staff and auxiliary support programs.
8. Construct expense budgets for attendance at an institution for the variety of programs and students including the single dependent student, the married student, the non-traditional students.
9. Design the institutional financial aid application and other internal forms.
10. Evaluate the variety of credentials of aid applicants.
11. Determine institutional priorities for the allocation of financial aid funds.
12. Coordinate the distribution of funds by priority.
13. Utilize the management information system for projections and evaluations of the program.
14. Assess needs for funds for the purpose of future budgeting requests from the institution, Federal and State governments.
15. Prepare recommendations for improvement of the program and operations from time to time as circumstances change or need update.
16. Prepare an annual report summarizing the activities of the student aid program.
17. Prepare reports utilizing information from the management information system which describes the participants in the financial aid program.
18. Demonstrate ability to maintain cumulative and comprehensive financial records.
19. Recognize the importance of developing the student personnel aspect of student aid.
20. Develop an awareness of the importance of interpersonal relationships in a financial aid office.
21. Demonstrate ability to implement policy on financial aid.
22. Adequately package aid, relating form and amount of aid to the individual's need.
23. Recognize the need for securing informational research on the conduct and effect of student aid.
24. Screen all applicants; categorize aid packages; allocate funds to specific programs; award aid to needy students.
25. Realize the importance of confidentiality in the financial aid process.
26. Make appropriate referrals when necessary.

27. Consider financial aid granting as an educational experience including counseling, information giving, follow-up, research and evaluation.
28. Discuss and detail with historical accuracy the various landmark Federal assistance programs to post-secondary education.
29. Identify the bases of the goals which influence legislation and appropriations proposals.
30. Evaluate the above goals and their impact on institutions of all types as well as families at the low and middle income levels.
31. Illustrate graphically the process of Federal aid to higher education from the idea to the actual tender of money to the institution and the individual.
32. Evaluate the problems of fluctuation in Federal aid levels to educations citing specific impacts to individuals and institutions.
33. Propose alternatives for stabilizing funds for education: Corporate (private) and personal (family level) as well as State or Federal.
34. List examples of the variety of corporate and foundation sources of assistance to institutions and individuals.
35. Propose an ideal form of private corporate aid to education being certain to take into account all variables.
36. Cite the historical trends and levels of corporate commitment of aid to education.
37. Defend the role of corporate responsibility to higher education.
38. Outline the impact of the economic cycle on families and their attendance in post-secondary education showing the relationship between enrollments and economic conditions.
39. List the variety of sources of funds which are available to individuals for use in post-secondary education.

III. BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

A. Counseling Technique and Methods/Psychology of Education/Psychological Tests and Measurement.

1. Demonstrate a professional attitude towards counseling and evidence ethical behavior.
2. Convey acceptance of the person being counseled and accept the right of the individual to make decisions and assume responsibility for his behavior.
3. Demonstrate flexibility in various counseling relationships.
4. Develop communication skills of understanding to assist the counselee in formulating alternatives and assessing possible consequences.
5. Project honesty and sincerity in attitudes by expressing "appropriate openness."
6. Demonstrate knowledge of the basics of psychological testing.
7. Develop ability to form a counseling relationship and handle an interview.
8. Utilize background information and case records in counseling.
9. Internally accept the need for confidentiality in all helping relationships.

10. Demonstrate counseling competence by effectively interviewing a person regarding a financial aid matter.
11. Make appropriate referrals when necessary.
12. Develop a personal synthesis and a philosophical framework to counseling.

B. Research in Financial Aid Problems/Statistics.

1. Identify significant problems relevant to financial aid situations and collect pertinent data to resolve these issues.
2. Select alternative solutions and weigh their consequences in terms of probability of effectiveness.
3. Develop a problem-solving and research oriented approach to financial aid program needs.
4. Synthesize concepts and theories and apply them to concrete financial aid situations.
5. Utilize imaginative approaches to situations and show a willingness to use new and different methods.
6. Demonstrate knowledge of basic statistical methods and how to apply them for purposes of research and professional growth.

Conclusion

The above objectives represent a basic nucleus of learning outcomes for the training of professional financial aid administrators. With no apology intended, it is recognized that additions and deletions of many of these objectives will be consistent with individual or program needs of those who might follow these suggestions for training. This taxonomy, then; is not the last word but is a beginning point in an area which needs a great deal of additional development.

APPENDIX C

National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (1974). Committee on certification. *NASFAA Newsletter*, 6(7), 4.

Committee on Certification

Charge: To establish whether or not there is a need for NASFAA to develop a standardized Certification process for financial aid administrators. If a system of Certification is needed and desirable, to explore the means by which such a Certification procedure may be established and conducted to determine the criteria upon which it should be based.

At the July meeting, the Committee again recognized the need for NASFAA to establish standardized certification procedures leading toward professional excellence, which includes training necessary for student financial aid administration, adherence to ethical principles, and continued professional growth.

According to the Committee, in order to be qualified for professional certification, a financial aid administrator should be required to meet the following criteria:

1. Three years of experience in financial aid administration;
2. Current membership in a financial aid association;
3. Formal training or academic preparation in an area relevant to the profession; and
4. Recommendation of the State Certification Committee.

Additionally, the candidates for certification should demonstrate managerial expertise (establishing goals and objectives, planning, budgeting and organizing a financial aid office, establishing effective on and off-campus relationships affecting the administration and coordination of the financial aid operation), effective financial aid administration, counseling and communicative skills, and evidence of research and evaluation skills. They should show evidence of professional development by meeting at least two of the following requirements: 1) attendance at professional meetings or workshops; 2) participation in professional meetings in a leadership role; 3) holding office in a professional association, 4) publishing or preparing professional papers, 5) or serving as a resource person to various publics.

Certification, when adopted, should follow the procedures listed below:

1. Applications and certificates should be developed and printed by the National Certification Committee subject to the approval of the National Council.
2. Certification Committees should be established in each state.
3. Applications and criteria would be distributed to State Certification Committees and applicants.

4. Individuals would submit applications with documentation and application fees to the State Certification Committees.
5. State Certification Committees would, in turn, submit these materials to the National Certification Committee.
6. Applicants would be notified of the decision by the National Certification committee and the president of the applicant's institution would be sent a copy.
7. All records would be maintained in the National Office, and certificates would be issued from there.
8. Appropriate appeals procedures would be established.
9. Certification would be valid for a five year period subject to the approval of the National Certification Committee.

It was recommended that the above procedures be distributed to State Associations with a ninety-day response period. Should positive responses be received, an effort will be made to coordinate with the NASFAA Committees on Ethics, Training, and Accreditation to study additionally the related issues of provisional certification, renewal certification, application format, application fees and the certification of National Council members and persons in national leadership roles.

APPENDIX D

***Professional Recognition of Financial Aid Administrators' Survey***

The topic of professional recognition of financial aid administrators has been discussed and debated for the past 38 years. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there is general agreement that entrance into the profession is limited and convoluted, and a plan is needed to attract qualified individuals to the profession on an continuing basis. This survey is being conducted to identify the opinions and concerns of financial aid administrators on the topic of , and to examine the need and willingness of the NASFAA membership to embrace credentialing. This survey provides the opportunity for you to agree or disagree with a professional recognition process, to evaluate a variety of recognition options, and to provide alternative options to those listed. You are encouraged to complete the entire survey.

For the purpose of this survey, professional recognition is defined as the establishment of a common set of core standards, or levels of standards that all financial aid administrators must meet. It may include one or more of the following: (a) voluntary credentialing; (b) degree program(s); (c) mandatory training and/or professional development activities; and/or (d) internships.

Institution Type. Please check the type of institution that you represent (Select all that apply):

- ☐ Public
- ☐ Private
- ☐ Proprietary
- ☐ Two-year
- ☐ Four-year
- ☐ Graduate/Professional
- ☐ Other (Please specify): _____

Location. My institution is located in the follow state/territory (select one):

- ☐ Alabama
- ☐ Alaska
- ☐ American Samoa
- ☐ Arizona
- ☐ Arkansas
- ☐ California
- ☐ Colorado
- ☐ Connecticut
- ☐ Delaware
- ☐ District of Columbia
- ☐ Federated States of Micronesia
- ☐ Florida
- ☐ Georgia
- ☐ Guam
- ☐ Hawaii
- ☐ Idaho
- ☐ Illinois
- ☐ Indiana
- ☐ Iowa
- ☐ Kansas
- ☐ Kentucky
- ☐ Louisiana
- ☐ Maine
- ☐ Marshall Islands
- ☐ Maryland
- ☐ Massachusetts
- ☐ Michigan
- ☐ Minnesota
- ☐ Mississippi
- ☐ Missouri
- ☐ Montana
- ☐ Nebraska
- ☐ Nevada
- ☐ New Hampshire
- ☐ New Jersey

- ☐ New Mexico
- ☐ New York
- ☐ North Carolina
- ☐ North Dakota
- ☐ Northern Mariana Islands
- ☐ Ohio
- ☐ Oklahoma
- ☐ Oregon
- ☐ Palau
- ☐ Pennsylvania
- ☐ Puerto Rico
- ☐ Rhode Island
- ☐ South Carolina
- ☐ South Dakota
- ☐ Tennessee
- ☐ Texas
- ☐ Utah
- ☐ Vermont
- ☐ Virgin Islands
- ☐ Virginia
- ☐ Washington
- ☐ West Virginia
- ☐ Wisconsin
- ☐ Wyoming

(End of Page 1)

Years of Experience. Please select the number of years of experience you have as a financial aid professional below.

- ☐ none
- ☐ less than 1
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5
- ☐ 6
- ☐ 7
- ☐ 8
- ☐ 9
- ☐ 10
- ☐ 11
- ☐ 12
- ☐ 13
- ☐ 14
- ☐ 15
- ☐ 16
- ☐ 17
- ☐ 18
- ☐ 19
- ☐ 20
- ☐ 21
- ☐ 22
- ☐ 23
- ☐ 24
- ☐ 25
- ☐ 26
- ☐ 27
- ☐ 28
- ☐ 29
- ☐ 30+

Education. My highest level of education is:

- ☐ Less than High School
- ☐ High School Diploma or its equivalent
- ☐ Postsecondary Certificate Program
- ☐ Associates level degree
- ☐ Bachelors level degree
- ☐ Masters level degree
- ☐ Doctoral or other terminal degree

(End of Page 2)

Occupation. My job title is:

- ☐ President/Owner/CEO/CFO
- ☐ Vice President/Assistant Vice President
- ☐ Dean
- ☐ Assistant/Associate Dean
- ☐ Director
- ☐ Assistant/Associate Director
- ☐ Manager/Supervisor
- ☐ Systems or Program Analyst/Computer Operator or Technician
- ☐ Counselor/Advisor/Officer/Coordinator
- ☐ Other Professional
- ☐ Receptionist/Secretary/Clerk/Processor
- ☐ Other Clerical
- ☐ Other - Please Specify _____

Functional Role. My primary functional role is:

- ☐ Chief Financial Aid Administrator
- ☐ Second in Command
- ☐ Systems Manager
- ☐ Compliance Officer
- ☐ Program Manager
- ☐ Fiscal Officer/Technician
- ☐ Program Assistant
- ☐ Application Processing
- ☐ Customer Service
- ☐ Data Entry
- ☐ Administrative Assistant
- ☐ Other

(End of Page 3)

Need and Level of Support for Professional Recognition. Please answer the following questions by checking Agree, Disagree, or No Opinion.

	Agree	Somewhat Agree	No Opinion	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree
1- There is a public need to ensure the accountability of financial aid administrators as fiduciaries.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2-There is a public need to ensure accountability of financial aid administrators to protect the public interest.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3-Professional recognition would increase the stature of and respect for the financial aid profession.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4-Credentialing is necessary to ensure financial aid administrators have a certain skill set and a certain level of expertise.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5-A mechanism is needed to ensure financial aid administrators pledge to uphold and keep the NASFAA statement of professional ethics.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6-Self-regulating the financial aid profession is	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

necessary to
ensure
institutional
administrative
capability.

7-Self-regulating
the financial aid
profession is
necessary to
prevent other
entities from
implementing
additional
regulations.

☐
☐
☐
☐
☐

8-There is no need
to set standards
beyond what is
currently in the
administrative
capability
regulations.

☐
☐
☐
☐
☐

9-I am in favor of
establishing a
recognized
curriculum in
financial aid
administration.

☐
☐
☐
☐
☐

10-I am in favor of
mandatory basic
training such as a
summer institute
or boot camp for
entry-level
professionals.

☐
☐
☐
☐
☐

11-I am in favor of
a mandatory
internship in a
financial aid office
for entry-level
professionals.

☐
☐
☐
☐
☐

12-I am in favor of
voluntary
credentialing for
financial aid
administrators.

☐
☐
☐
☐
☐

13-If a

☐
☐
☐
☐
☐

credentialing
process is adopted,
there should be a
phase in period for
current
practitioners.

14-I would ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

participate in a
voluntary
credentialing
process if one
were available.

15-I would ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

encourage others
to participate in a
voluntary
credentialing
process if one
were available.

16-I would pursue ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

a degree in
financial aid
administration if a
program were
available.

17-I would ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

encourage others
to pursue a degree
in financial aid
administration if a
program were
available.

(End of Page 4)

Professional Recognition Process.

Assume the majority of NASFAA members favor the establishment of a common set of core standards, or level of standards that all financial aid administrators must meet. Please answer the following questions about professional recognition.

The ideal professional recognition process would consist of: (Please select all that apply):

- ☐ Specialized college level courses in financial aid administration
- ☐ A college level certificate program in financial aid administration
- ☐ An associate level financial aid degree program
- ☐ A bachelor level financial aid degree program
- ☐ A graduate level financial aid degree program
- ☐ Internship program
- ☐ Voluntary entry level training such as a boot camp or summer institute
- ☐ Mandatory entry level training such as a boot camp or summer institute
- ☐ Voluntary continuing education units (CEUs)
- ☐ Mandatory continuing education units (CEUs)
- ☐ Voluntary advanced training and professional development
- ☐ Mandatory advanced training and professional development
- ☐ A certification examination
- ☐ Different levels of certification (entry, intermediate, and advanced)
- ☐ A minimum number of years of experience in financial aid administration
- ☐ Letters of recommendation
- ☐ Other (Please specify):

(End of Page 5)

Levels of Recognition.

How many levels of standards would you favor? (Check all that apply)

- ☐ A level for entry level practitioners covering basic core topics
- ☐ A level for intermediate level practitioners
- ☐ A level for program specific specialization (e.g. Loans, Federal Pell, etc...)
- ☐ A level for advanced level managers
- ☐ A single level applicable to all practitioners
- ☐ No preference
- ☐ Other (Please specify):

Duration of Recognition.

After the professional recognition credential is earned, the financial aid administrator's status should be: (Check only one response)

- ☐ Permanent
- ☐ Renewable
- ☐ Other: (Please specify) _____

(End of Page 6)

Additional Information.

What additional features should be included as part of a professional recognition process?

If you are not in favor of a professional recognition process, please explain why.

Please share any additional comments or suggestions about professional recognition of financial aid administrator.

(End of Page 7)

VITA

STACEY A. PETERSON

Old Dominion University
Darden College of Education, Room 210
Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership
Norfolk, VA 23529

EDUCATION

Ph.D., Higher Education, Old Dominion University, in progress.
M.Ed., Higher Education – Student Personnel Administration, Western Washington University, 1998.
BSBA – Concentration in Accounting, Old Dominion University, 1987.

EXPERIENCE

National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, Washington, DC

- Training Specialist, 10/2010 – Present
- Associate Director, 07/2005 – 09/2010
- Assistant Director, 07/1999 – 06/2005

Highline Community College, Des Moines, WA

- Director of Financial Aid Services, 11/1995 – 06/1999

Tacoma Community College, Tacoma, WA

- Associate Director – Financial Aid Services, 07/1994 – 10/1995
- Assistant Director – Financial Aid Services, 01/1993-07/1994
- Accountant, 11/1990-01/1993

SERVICE

NASFAA Research Committee, 07/2010 – 06/2011
NASFAA Institutional Program Management Committee, 07/2007 – 6/2010
NASFAA Training Committee, 07/2000 – 06/2006
Chair, WCTC Financial Aid Council, 07/1998 – 06/1999
Chair, WCTC Financial Aid Systems Team, 07/1997 – 06/1998 & 07/1996 – 6/1997